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To Be, or Not to Be...
Phil. 1:19-26

"To be or not to be is, that not the question? Whether tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune or to take arms against a sea of troubles and oppose them. Thus to die, to sleep no more." These lines taken from Shakesperes famous soliloquy, finds Hamlet on the horns of a dilemma. To be or not to be. To live or not to live. That is the question he asks. He believes he holds that option in his hands for to acquiesce and suffer the personal attacks, the slings and arrows and refuse to defend himself, refuse to defend what he holds to believe. His enemies will spare his life. Or to stand up for what he believes is true. To take arms against what he knows is unjust and face certain death for his convictions. To Hamlet his choice of life or death had no winning option. One could endure insults in suffering silence and live or stand up for what one believes in and face certain death. Either way there is no gain.

This morning we will study another great man of history who asked a similar question, yet with a different purpose comes an entirely different perspective. An attractive and contagious and eternal perspective that is full of life and hope and joy, even in the midst of a life and death choice.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the first chapter of Philippians. Paul is one who is convinced that Christ will triumph victoriously no matter what. Because Paul's purpose is so focused on Christ, he refuses to become a plaything of circumstance. In verses 12-18 we see that because his number one desire was to please God, difficult circumstances cannot rob him of joy. Criticism from others cannot steal his joy. And now in verses 19-26, the unknown future cannot embezzle his joy.

Is that a struggle with any of us? Do we sometimes allow ourselves to become embezzled by the unknown future, depriving us of joy in the present? Isn't it easy for many of us to find ourselves consumed by the "if I only had.." syndrome? If I only had a better job, one that paid more,

convenient hours....then I would give to the Lord's work then I'd serve him more faithfully, then I'd worship with his people...then I'd do what I know God wants me to be doing. If I only had..a better spouse. We are fighting all the time and it just zaps my emotional energy level. If we could just get along better. If only my kids would start respecting me. If only we had a new car... on and on. Filled with excuses of hope for the future. Oh, I'd get involved when our remodeling is finished. Oh, I'll start when things ease up at work. If only I had..."

Do you ever hear yourself saying those imprisoning words of self embezzlement that threaten to steal you of the joy? Do you give a list of reason why you will never taste the sweetness of joy in the present. Right now. This week? Regardless of the circumstance. Regardless of the opinions of others. Regardless of what the future looks like? Wouldn't it be great to be so filled with the satisfying purpose filled life in Christ that we didn't have to live in fear of the future. Wouldn't it be great to be filled with peace instead of anxiety? Wouldn't it be great to enjoy contentment instead of insecurity. Hope instead of discouragement. Would it not be delightfully infectious to radiate joy instead of fear? Everyone would want to know your secret. Everyone would want to know why we aren't worrying so much anymore. They would want to know why we aren't so easily upset. They would stop you and ask why aren't you complaining. Why is that big smile on your face? This type of life, is the life the Christ follower is called to. This is the life that Paul modeled for us in the book of Philippians. It is not a bury your head in the sand and deny you suffer. It is not a demented call to somehow think that suffering is to be enjoyed. It is a life that is driven by an all consuming passion that is radically different than most of us have been modeled. It is a Life purpose that is full of adventure yet overflowing with meaning and strategic significance. We CAN release our joy from the prison of the present and calm our fears of the future...Lets see how as we read Philippians 1:19-26. (READ)

Look at verse 19. Point #1 We can release our self-embezzled joy and calm our fears of the future by praying for each other. You may be thinking. That pretty old. I've tried that. It seems like my prayers hit the ceiling and fall down to the carpet. Look at verse 19. Paul is talking about the prayers of others. Who are those people right now in your life

who know your needs and are lifting up your concerns before the throne of grace? How many people can you name? If you aren't sure it would be wise to do some recruiting. I can attribute the strength of my ministry here to some folks I know are praying for Erin and I and all of you on a daily basis. We place our joy in chains when we fail to pray. Do you pray for others when they ask for it? Do you ever stop to pray right then? What kind of joy is soaked into our bones when we here that someone is praying for us? The fact that Paul could be counting on the Philippians to pray for him was a great source of joy. Verse 18. I will rejoice.. For I know."

Paul was looking to his deliverance. It was up to God to what kind of deliverance this would be. This could have been a deliverance, release from prison. This word deliverance is the same word used for salvation (soteria). If God allowed Paul to be killed, he was looking for an ultimate deliverance from this world to be with Christ. Paul looks for joyful deliverance supplied by the prayers of others and the provision of the Spirit. We need each other. We tend to be very individualistic in our faith. We talk about a personal relationship with Christ, but we need each other. The Russian Christians need the prayers of the saints in America. The believers in the churches in our community need our prayers and the provision of the Spirit. Paul is one who rejoices when he hears those who name the name of the Lord and preach the gospel, even some of their theology is a little different then ours. Paul is more concerned with God's kingdom then his own little castle. Pray for each other. Point #1 We can release our self-embezzled joy and calm our fears of the future by praying for each other.

Point #2 We can release our self-embezzled joy and calm our fears of the future by being a telescope for others. Wait a minute. What does that mean. Look at verse 20. The last part. "Christ shall...be exhalted, be magnified in my body whether by life or death." Paul says in my body, during my earthly existence, I want to make sure that Christ is magnified and exhalted.

Invented in 1250 AD, What does a magnifying glass do. When you look through it, objects appear bigger. A magnifying glass enlarges our view of what is already there. A telescope is similar. It brings things that are too small to see with the natural eye sight, close to view. Looking

through a telescope bring oooha and ahhhh's why. We begin to see incredible and beautiful things we never thought were there. Things we had never seen before.

What is Paul's desire? He wants existence on earth to be used as a telescope, a magnifying glass. So that when others look at him in his life or death they would be forced to say, Woooww! God is incredible. I never even have considered God before, but his life made me see how real and vital a relationship with God is. Look what God can do to change a life.

Our problem today is that we magnify the creation over the creator. We are image conscience and who gets the glory? Not the One who created. Paul viewed his body as the very temple of God that the spirit dwelled in I Cor 6:19-20 wrote, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the holy spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own, for you are bought with a price; therefore glorify God with your body. Folks that does not say glorify yourself with your body. God should be getting the glory. Others should be able to look at us and say wow, God is doing some neat things through her. Our bodies are the work shop of the Carpenter from Nazareth. Are we keeping our workshop clean? Is it an uncluttered place where the master carpenter would enjoy working? Are we being telescopes for others to see God more clearly? Maybe removing some barriers so they can see Him for the very first time. In the first line of this verse 20 Paul is earnestly expecting God to work. This word literally means to be straining at the neck to see whets up ahead. Paul is straining to look ahead to see how God will work in his situation.

Point #2, We can release our self-embezzled joy and calm our fears of the future by being a telescope for others.

Point #3 We can release our self-embezzled joy and calm our fears of the future by radically committing to a worthy LIFE Purpose. Look at verse 21. This is Paul's purpose. He wants to count for Christ. His number one desire is to please Him. To live IS Christ. He talked of an intimate connection with Christ. His total life is Christ. Not just to believe in Christ. Not just to simple live like Christ. Not just to follow his teachings, not just to confess a connection with Christ. His life is Christ. John 1:3,4 In Him was life and the life was the light of man. John 10:10 "I have come that they might have LIFE and have it more abundantly." I

John 5:11 "God has given us eternal life and this life is in His son. He that has the son has life. Galatians 2:20 "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."

Paul's purpose to live IS Christ! To die is gain. What does that mean? Here it is in the Living Bible. "For to me living means opportunities for Christ, and dying well that even better yet!" Here it is in the Phillips translation. "for living to me means simple Christ, and if I die, I should merely gain more of Him." Paul's life desire is to please Christ, magnify His name.

Our problem is that we are not totally convinced that Christ is the only thing worth living for...let alone dying for. Think back over the last week how would you fill in the blank. Last week, for me...to live was_____ What truly is your life? For me to live is a nice home. For me to live is being a great hunter, or fisherman. Do you think, For me to live is being the greatest mom. Would I have to fill in that blank last week, For me to live is being the best preacher. For you is your life practically dedicated to have a successful business. You see you know the answer not always by the time spent. Although that's a good place to start.

The Bible calls us "whatever we do, whether we eat or drink, do it all to the glory of God." While we are working hunting fishing, mothering or preaching, are we committed to giving God all the glory and pleasing Him in what we do? We know this is happening if we respond when God says drop this stuff your doing today, I have something else in mind. Are we allowing God to enter our schedules and plans. Is he being considered? If we are pleasing God in whatever we do, then people will look at us and say and say. That guy is a radically sold out Christian, and he also happens to be a great fisherman. That gal has a great heart for pleasing God and she can mother and home school with the best of them. We are not called to be so holy we are of no earthly good. We are called to be so holy we are of immense practical good. When we please God and put Him as number 1. Our family doesn't get ripped off. Our wives and kids don't get the short end of the stick. Our workplace doesn't suffer. Why? Because the by serving our family well, we are pleasing God. By providing for our family and being a diligent worker we are pleasing God. By loving our wives we are pleasing God and putting God number 1. Because that's what He called us to do.

To live is Christ and to die is gain. Death can only be a gain if its lived for Christ. Remove that word Christ and you must also remove the word gain. We must come to the point to be willing to empty ourselves of all our affections and desires and be centered and focused on Him. That radical commitment may someday in the future, not so distant call for giving of ones life. All of Jesus disciples, with the possible exception of John were either beheaded, crucified, boiled in oil or speared to death because they were convinced of the truth they knew.

Can you truly say along with Paul, For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain? It's hits in your 40's and 50's, mid-life crisis where men and women wake up to see their real Life purpose has embezzled joy from their life. They have climbed to the top of the ladder only to realize it's been leaning against the wrong building. Point #3 We can release our self-embezzled joy and calm our fears of the future by radically committing to a worthy LIFE Purpose.

Point #4 We can release our self-embezzled joy and calm our fears of the future by picking the option that would give God the most glory. In verses 22-26 Paul is wrestling with the dilemma. To be or not to be. To live or to die, that's the question on Paul's mind. To continue to live would mean v.22 more opportunities to serve Christ, more fruitful labor. But to die would mean to be in Christ presence. V.23 Far better. Why would Paul record this personal debate for the Philippians to read? I think Paul, all through this letter is spreading out a model for the Philippians, and us as well to follow. Paul calls "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ." Paul wants us to see the types of issues he is struggling with. He is struggling with the right issues. Which option is going to give God the most glory? That is Paul's acid test on what to do or not do. His purpose to please God and give glory to Him no matter what drives his actions. His purpose has been comprehensively tested; physical condition; opinions of others; position before secular government; a question of life or death. His purpose was severely tested yet he always came back and followed his purpose. I desire to please God no matter what. If we are struggling with the right questions and desiring to choose the option that would give God the most glory, we are not going to be worried about the wrong things. We are going to be more God centered and other centered...not self centered.

Verse 23 To depart and be with God" That word depart is in reference to death. This word was used to describe a group packing up their tents and going home. When Bill and Brian packed up their Elk camp less than 24 hours after they got there, they departed. Packed up and went home. That's Paul's desire to pack up his earthly tent, his body and go home to be in the presence of His Lord. Paul believes in a life after death. Paul rejects the idea of soul sleep where a person goes into an unconscious state of sleep until the final judgment. That would not be "Far better.." Paul is looking forward to something Far better...being in the presence of Jesus.

Notice that Paul would prefer to depart and be with Christ but is convinced that the option that would give God the greatest glory would be to stay on and encourage others to progress in joy and faith. That same word progress is used in verse 12, the word that speaks of clearing an impenetrable forest to allow an army to move forward. The more difficult option Paul sees as sticking around. But that's up to God. Often the more difficult and riskier option will be the one that brings the most glory to God. Sometimes it's more difficult to wait when we want to move forward. Sometimes it means to move ahead and step out in faith when we don't see all the pieces in place. We can release our self-embezzled joy and calm our fears of the future by picking the option that would give God the most.

Are we ready to stop embezzling ourselves of joy? Are we ready to release ourselves from fear of the future? Last week for me to live was _____. This week I want things to be different. I don't want to be a self-embezzler of the joy that God promises me. What is it going to take for us to move closer to contagious joy? It starts by honoring God with our lives, in every area of our lives. One whose purpose is half-hearted will easily be stopped, diverted and discouraged. For Paul, Caesar's chains did nothing to destroy his purpose or steal his joy. What is one area where God wants to start changing me? When Christ is central in our lives, He can calm our worries about the future. Then let's begin praying for each other. Be a telescope for others to see a bigger picture of God. Radically commit to a worthy LIFE purpose and think through your struggles in a way that picks the option that would bring God the most glory.

What's your purpose? it will drive your actions. If for me to live is money then to die is to leave it all behind. If for me to live is fame then to die is to be forgotten. For me to live is power, to die is to lose it all. For me to live is possessions, to die is to take none of it with me. Yet if for me to live is Christ, then to die is gain. We have no fear of the future for no matter what happens our life purpose will be fulfilled and we in turn will reap the by product of true joy.

Let me close with the very last words spoken by Joan of Arc just before being burned at the stake for her faith. "Every man gives his life for what he believes. Every woman gives her life for what she believes. Sometimes people believe in little or nothing, and yet they give their lives for that little or nothing. One life is all we have and we live it and thus it is gone. But to surrender what you are and live without belief is more terrible than dying. But there is a worse fate than living without belief. It is to live with a commitment which, at the portals of eternity, turns out to have betrayed you."

Folks, don't live for a weak joy stealing, betraying purpose. _