

9-20-20

Sermon- Just Imagine If...

Scripture- Philippians 1:21-30, CTW PS 105:1-10

Hymns- 96, 139, 127

Theme- To those who don't believe in God, life on earth is all there is, and so it is natural for them to strive for this world's values: money, popularity, power, pleasure, and prestige. For Paul however, to live meant to develop eternal values and tell others about Christ who would help them keep their focus on the kingdom.

I. Introduction: If there's one theme today that plagues Americans it's anxiety. We worry about so many things. We worry about things that the rest of the world aren't even aware of. Just think of all!

Paul says that we gotta have faith!

And, much like joy, faith begins with a small measure from God and we get to exercise and grow it.

Faith isn't based on what we think up and then demand that God do it. It all starts with Him. He directs us, places those directions, thoughts in our minds and then we act on them whether we understand fully or not.

You see faith is not understanding the full direction, it's knowing the what and not necessarily the why. It's understanding the command. God says "go" and I go even if I don't understand the why.

A. You see, spiritual growth is not automatic, it's not magical, it's nurtured and you get to choose to have it.

HOW DO I GROW IN MY FAITH? Well, the good news is, first, it **is** possible. The bad news, it seems, at first is that you have to die!

Look at the Apostle Paul's life verse. The verse that guided all he did. **Galatians 2:20 (ESV)**

"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

So, Paul tells us that he finally came to the end of himself, and he finally buried that old person by the power of Christ and took up a new life that is now empowered by Christ in him.

Paul is the writer of the letter to the Philippians. It's 62 AD just 8 years from a devastating destruction of the temple in Jerusalem by the Roman leader Titus. Paul was imprisoned during the writing of this book awaiting his own release or death, and it was death that came to him at the hands of Nero, between 84-88AD. Paul dies by beheading about the same time that the Apostle Peter is crucified upside down.

He knew this was awaiting, he knew eventually he would give his life, yet he pens this letter to the churches in Philippi. So, what's the theme? "Death and destruction?" "Get ready 'cause they're coming for you too?" **NO, THE THEME IS JOY!**

B. Did Paul know something the rest of us don't? Well maybe not, but he certainly believed something most of us don't; that God is able in life and in death.

We come to chapter 1 and Paul is so grateful and thankful for the people of Macedonia who have helped him and the ministry along the way. They gave finances to help the work continue and to sustain him.

He writes to encourage these believers by telling them that his imprisonment has actually caused a greater spread of the gospel and that their gifts have meant the world to him.

Now the question forming in your mind might sound like this if you're really honest about it:

WITH ALL THAT I'M FACING , (THINGS LIKE COVID-19, ELECTIONS, RIOTS, DEFUNDING POLICE DEPARTMENTS, ABORTION, LGBTQ, ETC., ETC.), HOW CAN I REMAIN THANKFUL AND JOYFUL?

Well that depends, are you hoping for joy or happiness?

Let's TALK ABOUT Paul's word to the Philippians in Chapter 1, 21-30, and see what the Holy Spirit reveals to us!

Paul knew that while he worked to share God's love, God was honoring it, and when he died, he would receive the great reward of being in the Lord's presence.

Earlier in verses 18-20, leading up to our lesson for today, Paul says, "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."

CERTAINLY, THE FLESH OF PAUL LONGED FOR RELEASE, BUT HE COULD SEE THAT GOD WAS USING HIS SUFFERING AND WOULD EVEN USE HIS DEATH FOR A GREATER PURPOSE.

II. In Today's Verses, Paul faces death and the test of his faith.

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.

A. The options are, live in the flesh or be in the presence of god. In the flesh Paul was under arrest. Can you see the dilemma?

"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. **(Vs. 19-26)**

Paul wanted to go but knew that remaining was good for the believers. He was willing to stay as long as God wanted.

The reason we can have joy at all times and can be thankful is that our lives are in God's hands. When we finish this life, we are with Him. It created quite a conflict for Paul because as much as he wanted to be here and complete his work, he couldn't wait for the day that he would see Jesus.

His thought was if I'm here God has a purpose for me, if I'm not here, I'm in the presence of God!

So how do I exercise perseverance? I am to journey with total assurance in life, and in death

B. In this passage, Paul gives us a gift we can use to persevere: THE PRINCIPLE OF FOCUS.

The principle of focus is such that whatever we are **truly** focused on is what we are **truly** moving toward.

The Gospel of the Jesus will never be known in your office or your home or neighborhood until you live it out.

It takes intentionality, great focus to see that happen, to see what's going on around you.

To say each day, "God my life is Yours today!"

Paul says it this way in verses 27-30:

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

This raises a profound and ongoing question for all of us...no Christian is exempt: “Can you say that your life is worthy of the gospel?”

C. Understand this: There’s much happening around you, but what God is doing in you is so important because it informs all of your life, those who know you, and those who only watch you to see the kind of person you are.

Paul closes this section by telling the believers that they have been granted the privilege for suffering for Christ.

Many of us may secretly hate that thought and despise the very words of having to suffer because we’re Christians.

Afterall, the word “Suffer” – means to experience unpleasant things

- Well, think of it, you suffer for your pay check – Why not Christ?
- You suffer for your home – why not Christ?
- You suffer for your children and spouse – why not Christ?

The reality is, we really don’t know what suffering is when it comes to the Gospel.

III. What’s your complaint about living as a Christian in this country?

My encouragement to you is, that you’ll be so glad you did when you get to the end of this life as we know it! We must **daily** live lives worthy of the message of Christ!

With this in mind, the way of Joy is not succeeding, it’s surrendering! The way of joy is when I become more and more like Jesus, dead to myself.

What are you going to do with your life? Seek for happiness or live in joy? It's up to you.

Are you willing to surrender it all to Jesus and allow His true life to be formed and live in you?

The only way a person can do as Paul has done is through a life changing experience with Jesus Christ. His death was the door to life. He died for you in your place and offers the forgiveness of sins and a new life in Him.

Remember that in Romans 10:9-10, 13 – Paul sums it all up for us in a way that really should ease our minds:

⁹If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is LORD," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

¹⁰For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. ¹¹As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame." ¹²For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same LORD is LORD of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved."

Imagine if every person in this room decided to live not for the moments or for the applause, but for the day we stand before the King of kings!

Imagine if we suffer because of Christ we see His love formed in us all the more...imagine! Oh the things we could achieve for the kingdom!

Amen? Let Us Pray...