

House Church Message Notes April 26th, 2020 – In Lockdown (8 Weeks in Philippians)

Week 2: The Gospel in Lockdown (Philippians 1:12-26)

• **Introduction: My Friend Kiran**

- *“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” (Phil. 1:21)*
 - What kind of a statement is *that*?! Have you ever met someone who actually lived like that? Someone who could say, “You know, it will be better for me to be with Jesus, I would *rather* be with Jesus than be living my life on this earth. But while I’m alive, it’s Christ, it’s all Christ.”
 - Pastor Kiran Paul is a man I feel, frankly, unworthy, to call a friend. He is an Indian pastor, evangelist, and orphanage director. At a previous church I served, we had the privilege of sending a small team of people on a mission trip to India with an organization called “Children to Love.” There, they served with Kiran and his family at their home for orphans in Machulpatnam, India. (Some of you might remember when Kiran visited our church a little over a year ago to preach and share about his ministry; if you want to learn more about it, let me know, because their ministry needs prayer and support as much as ever).
 - Kiran grew up in a Hindi family; his father and their fathers before them were Hindi priests—they were among the elite class of India’s caste system. When Kiran was a young man, his father had a dramatic encounter with Christ while in the hospital and it turned their world upside down. Kiran rebelled against his father’s Christian faith because of the shame it brought to their family. Yet, he ended up in a place of such deep depression that one day he was ready to take his life and throw himself in front of a train—for him at that time, “to live” no longer meant anything. In that moment, God reached into his life and miraculously rescued him. Kiran completely devoted himself to Christ. Since then, He has planted dozens, if not hundreds of churches in India, and his family has started an orphanage where hundreds and hundreds of orphans have been rescued and loved into the arms of Jesus.
 - India is becoming a more and more dangerous place to be a Christian, let alone rescue children from the evil systems of poverty and human trafficking. Kiran has a lot of enemies in a lot of places. On one occasion when he and his wife were visiting our church, we asked how we could pray for him. I’ll never forget his response:
 - “Pastor David and Pastor Dale,” he said, “You can please pray that I will have the privilege of giving my life up a martyr for Christ.” You could tell from his expression that he wasn’t bragging, he wasn’t being dramatic, he wasn’t saying something he thought he was “supposed” to say (as we pastors sometimes do). He really, humbly, meant it. And that’s when I knew that I had met someone who truly grasped the mystery, “to live in Christ, to die is gain.”
 - We’re going through the book of Philippians, chapter by chapter, verse by verse, for the next 8 weeks. Last week, we looked at the opening of the letter where Paul described the *joy* and gratitude he found in the church of Philippi while in chains. This week, we’re looking at chapter one verses 12 to 26, where Paul talks about how God is actually using his present hardship to advance the Gospel.
 - The best thing you could do in this series is to open your Bible with me, right where you are, and follow along as we look at this verse by verse. So open up to Philippians 1 and we’ll start with verses 12 to 14.

• **Philippians 1:12-14**

- *¹² Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel.*
 - Paul changes the focus now from his joy in the Philippians faith and his prayer for their growth to giving them reassurance and insight into his situation—they would surely have been worried about his status when they found out he was being imprisoned. And as the focus shifts to Paul’s experience, he shares some amazing, even shocking, perspectives on his hardships.
 - He has come to see that, while he is being held in prison for no crime, but for the proclamation of Christ the King, God is using even this to advance the Gospel.

- This is one of the powerful mysteries of following Christ: when we begin to see our primary identities as servants of Christ, as God's holy people, we can look at *any* circumstance that comes to us and eventually be able to say, "*what has happened to me has actually served to advance the Gospel.*"
- Paul is thinking here like Joseph in the book of Genesis who said to his treacherous brothers, "what you intended for evil, God actually intended for good," (Genesis 50:20).
- God can take the horrible circumstances of this fallen world and bring about His greatest works in our worst experiences.
- In another letter written from prison at another time, Paul wrote that he was being chained like a criminal for proclaiming the Gospel of Christ, "but God's word cannot be chained" (2 Timothy 2:9). *The Gospel cannot be chained.* Isn't that a wonderful thought?
- *¹³As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. ¹⁴And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.*
- Paul's imprisonment has served the advance of the gospel in two ways: through his witness to all the roman soldiers of the palace guard who were hearing that there is another Ruler besides Caesar—and through the emboldening of believers who were following Paul's leadership.
- Look at those phrases *confidence in the Lord* and *daring to proclaim the Gospel without fear*...we can read this and pray that the same could be said of us. But how often do we live in fear of others opinions? We need to be awakened from our slumber to the power of the Gospel.
- **Philippians 1:15-18**
 - *¹⁵It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. ¹⁶The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. ¹⁸But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.*
 - We don't know everything about this group who is trying to stir up trouble—is it another faction of Christians who oppose Paul's approach of ministry and interpretation of the Gospel? Or is it naysayers shedding light on his imprisonment for this "crazy" message of a crucified king?
 - Whatever it might be, think of how discouraging and painful it can be to be misrepresented and misunderstood. To be misjudged for your core convictions. It happens every day in this world—and this is one of the reasons why we allow ourselves to be imprisoned with fear.
 - Yet, on top of everything Paul's going through, he still rejoices in the simple fact that Christ is being proclaimed.
- **Philippians 1:19-24**
 - *"Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, ¹⁹for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. ²⁰I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.*
 - Have you noticed how many times Paul has spoken of "joy" and "rejoicing" so far? It's four times just in the first chapter. And remember, *he's in prison*. What's his secret? Well, that's kind of what this book is about.
 - "Through God's provision of the Spirit of Christ"—this is the secret to Paul's joy and faith, the secret to his whole life, as we see in the next verse.
 - *²¹For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²²If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body."*
 - There's that shocking statement again: "to live is Christ and to die is gain." We're going to come back to this at the end, but for now, I just want to ask: how does that statement make you feel? Joy, hope, fear, guilt, confliction? Let's finish the passage then come back to this.

- **Philippians 1:25-26**

- *"²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me."*
 - It's a marvel to see just how completely Paul has surrendered the meaning and significance of his life to Jesus.
 - He longs to depart from this life to be with Christ, but he knows that his purpose in remaining is to serve the desires that Jesus has for his life—that is, in order to continue with the believers in their "progress and joy in the faith." *Paul's purpose for his life and Christ's purpose for his life have become one and the same.*
 - Going back to the very opening of the letter, he is, in actuality, *a servant of Christ*. And as we are seeing and will see even more as this letter goes on—surprisingly, this kind of devotion and surrender *is the most joyful, satisfying way to live because of who our master, Jesus, is.*
 - And God's desires for your life are the same: the Lord desires that you would grow, and progress in your faith, that you would find utter joy and contentment and peace in your faith. And as we read last week, He is determined to complete and perfect this good work that He started in you. Be encouraged, dear friends.

- **Conclusion**

- So, what does all this mean as we walk through this crisis, our own lock-down? This week, a member of the House of Representatives called our present situation, "The biggest public health and economic crisis this nation has seen in 100 years. What started just weeks ago is having a devastating impact across our country." Nearly 900,000 cases and 50,000 deaths, and 22 million initial unemployment claims in the past month. That's not to mention the *global* impact.
- Our situation may look very different from Paul's, but what if we adopted his mindset specifically for this time in our lives? "To live is Christ, to die is gain." What if we simply repeated that to ourselves throughout the course of our day, "To live is Christ, to die is gain." Do you believe that? Would you dare to believe that, to give yourself over to that more, and more, and more?
- Later in Philippians we'll get to the place in a couple weeks where Paul says, "I have learned the secret of living in every situation..." (Philippians 4:12b NLT) And it's obvious from everything Paul wrote and lived what that secret was for him: the secret to living is none other than *Jesus Christ*, in all His fullness. Abiding in Christ, living for Christ, serving Christ, loving Christ, *thriving in Christ*. "To live is Christ," and if living fully *is* Christ, then truly, "to die *is* gain," because we will then be perfectly united with Christ, we will know fully even as we are fully known (1 Corinthians 13), we will be with God forever.
- We may not always *feel* it to be true, as Paul did from his imprisonment, that "to live is Christ, to die is gain." In fact, the thought might initially terrify you. We may wrestle with so many competing motives and demands and struggles and desires and longings. We may not in this moment feel in our hearts, "it will be a gain for me to leave this earth." But whether or not you *feel* this to be true in this moment: *to live is Christ, to die is gain* is objectively true of your life as a Christian. It is simply true for you as a Christian that your true life is found in Christ, and when you leave this earth—the bad stuff, the struggles, the lockdowns and diseases, as well as everything you love—it will be *better* for you when you are with Christ. It will be better for you to be with Jesus, face to face. And there you will wait for the day when He restores all things and gives you a glorified, resurrected body like His own.
- So, however you're doing right now, whatever you're feeling in this struggle of life: it's still true of you, it's true of me, *to live is Christ, to die is gain*. Because we are God's holy people, we are servants of this same Christ whom Paul preached. And if that's true, *what is there really to fear?* What is there we can really lose, what is there we really need, if to live is Christ and to die is gain? Search your heart. Be still for long enough, dig down deep enough, and you'll find that as Christ dwells in you, the joy of heaven is calling to you, filling you, strengthening you, underneath it all. And sometimes it takes a hardship—a *lockdown*—to strip everything away and find, underneath it all, *to live is Christ, to die is gain*. So, what is there to fear? Amen.