

Joy in Uncertain Times

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[0 : 00] So as I said before, how do we live with an uncertain future?

When we do not know what the future holds, we do not know if things will get better or worse, how do we live? We hope for certain outcomes.

We hope for peace. Our society is in war. Nobody's listening to each other. We are in a health crisis.

How will that turn out? We continue to hope for good results. We hope for recovery. We're in a presidential race.

We hope for good things there. All we hear are other things. And so with an uncertain future, how do we deal with that?

[1 : 15] How do we work through that? How do we think about that? Especially as Christians, how do we deal with our expectations? We have hopes and expectations. We're hoping for things to get better.

We're hoping for things to progress. We're hoping for peace. We're hoping for health. We're hoping for more unity.

In our times, it's easy to become fearful and anxious or retreat and despair or become angry.

And all of that's going on. Those are natural responses. How do we live in this? And then beyond that, can we even find joy in it?

See, for Paul, this struck me because for Paul, no matter what the future held for him, life or death, and this is, we're talking about ultimate for him, it didn't matter what the future was.

[2 : 23] His conviction was the same, live or die. His conviction was the same. To live? Christ. To die?

Cain. Cain. How about you? How would you end that phrase?

To live is? Say it. Think it to yourself. I mean, be honest to yourself. What does that mean? What's the center of your life? What holds you?

What's your conviction? When you go through days and weeks, what is it that drives you, that motivates you, that centers you, that renews you, that compels you to live is?

Family. Career. Grandchildren. That could be anything. Amusement.

[3 : 26] I was talking to a couple this week about how they live and they kind of just deal with their job. and look forward to time off.

They live for the time off. Job is necessary. Do it. Get through it. But man, I'm looking forward to the day off.

I'm looking forward to the weekend. That's what they live for. And I'm thinking, that's what you live for. And a lot of people, I think, are in that situation.

And right now, even in the midst of all the stuff going on, a lot of those freedoms are kind of cut back. And so, if I live for my day off, there's only so many things I can do now on my day off, maybe. Although, more people are heading to Palmer Lake here.

You know, whatever. I mean, they're desperate to find some outdoor, you know, get it. I get it. Yeah. I live here, so it's, you know, I don't have to go. So, you know, how do we handle that pressure?

[4 : 33] And we're seeing, as the months go by, the pressure's building, and that affects other things. It affects the social crisis, and it affects the election. It affects everything.

So, how do we live? And what does Paul mean by this? To live is Christ. And so, it doesn't really matter what my expectations are.

I still have expectations. And he's going to talk about that. And so, what we have here in chapter 1 of Philippians is Paul sharing, really, in a unique way, his inner thoughts.

He's unusually personal here. We get these unusual statements. To me, you know what I think? You know what my conviction is?

To me, to live, that's all Christ. To die. We get him walking through his thoughts here. It's very unusual.

[5 : 31] I think he feels very close with this congregation, and he knows they really deeply care about him. And so, he just kind of shares that. Here's how I'm thinking. This is how I'm dealing with it.

Here's my conviction, and this is how it leads to how I kind of work things out. He refers to himself, either as I, or me, or my, 17 times, in these eight and a half verses, from 18 to 26.

17 times. Me, me, me, I, I, I, I. It's very personal. He walks us through how he thinks about the uncertainty of his future.

He has, he has preferences, and he has recognitions. He, he, he's dealing with all of that. How do we, how do we do that? And so, he's teaching by modeling.

He's teaching by example. He's showing them, this is how I think it through. So, so far we've seen that Paul has taught us about finding joy in the present.

[6 : 39] In verses three to eight, he talked about finding joy in the shared passion for the gospel. He, he, he thinks when he prays for these Philippians, he prays with joy, he says.

I pray with joy for you, because I remember your participation with me. You, you, you, you're not just sending me a check. You're, you're engaged in this gospel ministry yourself.

And then his prayer for them in verses nine to 11 reveals that this passion for the gospel springs from a maturing love that is empowered by Christ.

And it's a maturing love in verse 10 that causes us as our love matures and abounds, it begins to see things different. It begins to understand and recognize the things that really matter and the things that don't matter as much.

And so for Paul, being constrained in prison, being under affliction, does not matter as much to him as the gospel going forward.

[7 : 41] And so that's how he continues in verse 12 and following the gospel progress. That's what matters. Not my personal loss of freedom, not my, not my affliction where others are, are, are, are preaching, but their motives are motives to hurt me.

And yeah, that hurts. I hear it. I get it. But you know what? At the end of the day, that what matters to me is that the message is out, even though the motives are bad. And so what really matters?

Well, what really matters is the gospel progresses, even though I don't progress. And the message of the gospel matters more than the motives of the preachers. It's still the message of Christ.

Even though their motives are wrong, they're, you know, God will hold them accountable to that. But what people hear is the right message. And that's all that matters to Paul. That their motives are messed up and wanting to somehow hurt me.

Hey, bring it. Keep preaching. As long as you're preaching the gospel. So we're learning. I, I, I see more and more. And now in this passage, we'll be in, Paul is displaying what really matters.

[8 : 53] As his love is growing and abounding, he's understanding there are things, there are lots of things that are good, but some things are more important than other things. People matter more than programs or politics.

Message over motives. So now we come at the end of verse 18. He talks about his joy for those things in the present. Now he begins to look forward.

He not only has present joy, but he has, he foresees joy in the future. Even though the future is uncertain. And he trusts that he will continue to rejoice in these future uncertain expectations.

And they're based, and they're based, and it's based on, I believe, two convictions. I think Paul shares two convictions here. One is an ultimate conviction, which drives everything. And that's that conviction to live as Christ, to die as king.

That just, that, that summarizes his life and his focus and his, and his, and how he decides everything, how he thinks about everything. That's his conviction, his ultimate conviction. But then that leads to secondly, a practical conviction.

[10 : 10] Because then from verse 22 on, he begins to focus on, okay, now here's where I am. Here's my options. Here's the different outcomes. Here's how I think that through. So he has a conviction that's ultimate, and then he has a conviction that's practical.

So in verses 18 to 21, let's look at the ultimate conviction, which is to live as Christ, to die as gain. We've heard that. If you've been a Christian a while, you've, you've read that, you've heard that.

That's, and if you're a Christian, that, that statement resonates with you, you get it. At least on some level, to live as Christ. Yeah. Yeah. That's pretty much it.

To, to live as Christ, to die is gain. Oh, I get that. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. The older I get, the more I'm looking forward to that. Right. I want to be here.

I don't want to miss stuff. There's still, there's people, you know, I get Paul's struggle with, I want to be with Christ. You can't get better than that, but I still love you guys.

[11 : 12] And you know, to die is gain. Oh yeah, I get that. But to live as Christ, what's that mean? What does he mean by that? For Paul, it's not a motto.

It's not a trite saying. Yeah. To live as Christ. Yeah. We all agree with that. Yeah. But do we live like that? See, Paul lived that way. I mean, that was his, his conviction.

It affected his decisions. It affected how he thought about things. It affected how he analyzed things. It affected everything. It affected his joy. That's why he can say, I rejoice in the unexpected, because I have, I have this conviction.

To live as Christ, to die is gain. So why can he rejoice? So let's look at this. Verse 18, I will rejoice. I will continue to rejoice.

Why? Verse 19, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the spirit of Jesus Christ, this will turn out for my deliverance. So he has an expectation of deliverance.

[12 : 15] He's confident he will be delivered. Now what's interesting about this word is it's the normal word in the New Testament for salvation. Our translators have translated the word for salvation as deliverance.

And that's, and that's okay. It, it does mean that. But, 19 out of 20 times in the New Testament they translate it as salvation.

So why hear deliverance? The translators are believing that he's talking about a physical deliverance. This will turn out for my deliverance.

I believe I'll be released. Well, is that what he means? We, we can only know how to translate a word by its context. And so what does he say in his, in this context? Now, toward the end of the passage, we know that he's, Paul is expecting to go see them again.

But at this point, he's not convinced of that because we're going to see him work through this. We're going to see that ultimately he's going to come to a conviction that yeah, he's going to go to them.

[13 : 24] Not, not go the other way. So, what is this expectation? First, I want you to see where does this confidence come from?

Look at verse 19. I know it'll turn out for my deliverance. How? I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit, this will turn out for my deliverance.

See, he's trusting in two things. He's confident and, and has faith in two things. One, that they pray for him. He really, really counts on that.

I'm, I know that through your prayers, your prayers actually make a difference. Paul's counting it. The, the prayers affect the other part too.

through the provision of the Holy Spirit. So, Paul's saying, I, I count on God. I count on Christ. I count on the Holy Spirit to provide what I need. But I also know the other key ingredient is your prayers.

[14 : 31] God works through your prayers. So, that, that's how. And, the provision of the Holy Spirit.

Remember what Jesus said in, in Mark 13. Remember he was talking about, you know, trial and tribulation will come, false Christ will come. They will deliver you over to law courts. And remember what Jesus said, don't be afraid in those moments.

When they deliver you to the court, the Holy Spirit will give you the words that you need at the time. And so, Paul's trusting that. He's, he's going to have to give his defense. He's given his defense in Acts before different judges so far.

He's given it before Festus. He's given it before the governor. He's ultimately going to give his confession before Nero himself. That's what he's waiting for.

To go before Caesar. He's going to give his testimony before Caesar. And so, he's trusting that the Holy Spirit will provide the words when that comes. Because what do you say to that guy? It's one thing talking to Festus.

[15 : 34] It's another thing talking to Nero. The guy's out there. Okay? He's playing fiddle while the room's burning, right? At least, that's the story.

What's he doing? He's trusting in that. But deliver how? Now, look at how he continues to talk about this.

I'm confident through your prayers and the prison of the Spirit that this will turn out for my deliverance. Verse 20. Now, he's going to define that more. As it is my eager expectation and hope, what?

Hope what? That I will not at all be put to shame, but with, but that with full courage, now as always, Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.

What's essential to him? Delivered how? According to his hope. His hope is that he will not be ashamed, he will not be disgraced, he will not be dishonored, that however his life goes, whether by life or by death, that he will honor Christ and not dishonor Christ.

[16 : 50] He's confident that when push comes to shove, when he stands before Pharaoh, whatever comes, he will not be ashamed.

He will not have something that he looks back on and goes, I wish I'd have been more bold. He's confident that because of the prayers and because of the Holy Spirit, he will be as bold as he needs to be, he will be as wise as he needs to be, and there won't be any reason to look back and feel ashamed.

Feel like, oh, I'm disappointed in myself. I dishonored Christ in some way. So he's confident that that won't happen. But what? What's his hope? His hope is that Christ will be honored in his body.

How? By life or by death. So what deliverance is he talking about? If he's going to be honored in his, if Christ is going to be honored in his body by life or by death, what kind of deliverance is he talking about?

Not a physical deliverance. He's talking about ultimate salvation. No matter what happens, if I live or die, I'm saved. I'm good. I know that. I know through your prayers and through the provision of the Spirit, I will be okay.

[18 : 10] And he's also teaching them how to pray for him in this situation. Now it's fine for them to pray, let Paul be released, Lord. We want to see him again. But he's also teaching them to pray, you know what?

It's not up to Paul. It's not really up to Nero either. It's up to Jesus. Is he going to live or is he going to die?

Is Jesus done with him or not? Now by the end of this section, Paul's going to go, I don't think I'm done. I'm pretty convinced. I'm still here.

When you read a few years later, his letter to 2 Timothy, whole different tone. I've done it. Run the race. I finished the course. I know I'm done.

But here, I don't think I'm done yet. I don't think I'm done yet. So, what is essential to Paul, notice, is not that he lives.

[19 : 15] What his eager expectation and hope is not that he lives. His eager expectation and hope is that Christ will be honored in his body whether he lives or he dies.

So, if he lives, that Christ keeps getting honor through whatever he does. If he dies, that he dies in a way that honors Jesus. How do you do that, by the way?

How do you die in a way that honors Jesus? If you've ever read Fox's Book of Martyrs, he will talk about people who died for Jesus in horrible ways.

They're on fire, right? And he'll talk about people witnessing these people dying and they're singing hymns while they're in flames. They're giving testimony to God.

It's kind of like Stephen, the way Stephen died, right? Lord, forgive them. I see Jesus, you know. It's not that they die, it's how they die. And so, Paul's saying, that's what matters to me is that Christ gets honor whether he wants me to live or he wants me to die.

[20 : 29] That I live in such a way that honors him or that I die in such a way that honors him too. Somebody brought up the question this morning about, you know, if you die, how does that bring honor?

Because people could look at that as, oh, see, God didn't save them. And how's that honoring to Christ? Oh, Jesus must be a failure. Jesus, you know, here's another one of Jesus' people that dies. How is God honored in that?

Well, that's what I think. It's the way they die. And it's the testimony that they leave behind. They die without fear. They die with faith. They die with honor and dignity.

They die honoring the Lord. And people see that. People see that. And that's what Paul's concerned with.

So why? Why does that drive him? Why is that his ultimate goal? Notice verse 21. He explains it. That Christ will be honored in my body whether by life or by death.

[21 : 34] Why? For, to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. What's essential for me is Christ honored.

And by the way, that word honored means magnified. How's Christ honored? Well, he's magnified. He's enlarged. He's brought to life. The people see Christ through me.

Christ gets credit in the way that I live or die. He's good either way. Why is he good either way? Even as he's facing death, what is his deep and abiding conviction?

Whether I live or die that Christ is honored. Why? Because here's my conviction. To live is Christ. To die is gain. To live is Christ.

Christ. What does that mean? So, I got curious. So, I take the word in my computer, the word for to live, and I say, search.

[22 : 39] And it goes through all the places in the New Testament where this verb to live goes. And there's a lot of places. New Testament talks about living a lot. But I was curious, okay, to live is Christ.

Is there other things that the New Testament writers talk about about living that gives me a clue about what living for Christ means? Well, yeah.

It talks about living to God. Dying to sin, living to God. It talks about not living for ourselves, but living for Christ.

Okay? So, to live as Christ means to live for Christ. That's, he's my motivation and example. But then it talks also about things like those who live, what did Jesus say?

Man should not live by bread alone, but he'll live by every word that comes from the mouth of God. Jesus himself talked about living by the word of God.

[23 : 54] Okay, so, to live as Christ I think involves that too, the word. And then Paul talks about living by the spirit. Well, that's probably connected to this whole to live as Christ because the spirit's all about, right, pointing to Christ.

Living by faith. We not walk by sight, we walk by faith. We live by faith in the Son of God. So, what's to live as Christ?

It's living for Christ, not for self. It's living by his word. It's living by faith. It's living by his spirit. In an essence, to live as Christ means that it's all about him. That's how we start our service every week, isn't it?

We need to remind ourselves of that. Those aren't mottos that we say at the beginning of the service. this. In fact, our call to worship this morning is where one of those ideas came from.

It's good to be with brothers who are in unity, right? So, it's good to be with God's people. It's good to be in the Lord's house on the Lord's day with the Lord's people.

[25 : 05] It's just a little way of trying to remind ourselves, okay, why am I here? Oh, yeah, this is a good thing. It's a good thing. Good to folks.

And so, it's all about him. It's all about him. It's not about us. Because I wake up every morning thinking it's about me. And I know better than that.

But I still wake up before I've renewed my mind. And I'm thinking, right, right? I'm sorry, but I just don't wake up happy.

It's got to kind of work through something. And you hear voices. I know, not that kind of voices.

Voices from myself. Right? Voices from myself. And that's where, you know, Psalms teaches us to stop listening to yourself, start talking to yourself.

[26 : 10] Right? I say to my soul, right? Preach to yourself. Because we do too much listening to ourselves, and that's part of the problem. We have to tell ourselves, especially our soul.

You've got to tell your soul what to do. Because your soul, if you let your soul run it, it's, you know, you're done. No, you're not done. So to live is Christ.

It means to live with purpose, to live with focus. It's an active, daily renewal. To live is Christ. Is it a conviction for you?

How does it look? Well, let me give you a parallel verse, Galatians 2, where Paul kind of talks about the same kind of thing, dying and living. In Galatians 2, 19, he says, for through the law I died to the law.

So I died to a certain kind of living. I died to the law so that I might live to God. Interesting. I had to die to one thing in order to live to another thing. I had to die to the law in order to live to God.

[27 : 16] But I thought the law was God. But he's talking about a certain kind of living. I died to the law in terms of an external kind of living, and now I'm living to God, about a relationship.

I live for him and before him. He goes on, I've been crucified with Christ. There he gives about this dying thing again. I've been crucified with Christ, and that has changed things.

It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. Now he's talking about a transformation. What does that mean? Unless you're a Christian, you don't really get what that means.

I've been crucified with Christ. It's no longer I who live. What do mean no longer I who live? I still live. Yeah, he's going to say that in just a minute. He's talking about a focus here, though. It's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh.

Oh, see, there it is. He's still living. The life I now live in the flesh, how do I do that? The life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God.

[28 : 23] Who, why do I live by faith in him? Because he's the one who loved me and gave himself for me. And so I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

I live differently because Christ did die. The law now is taken out of the issue in terms of how I live. not that there's anything wrong with the law, it's simply I can't live by the law.

Because the law is there simply to show that I can't keep it. So I died to the law. I don't live externally. I don't live by going through certain motions.

I live now by a whole different way, by faith, by an internal relationship with God. So that's how it looks. It's not an external kind of living. It's dying to the law so that I might live to God.

It's an internal, intimate walk with God. It's not this, okay, I conform to these behaviors and so that I look like a Christian. That's a Pharisee walk.

[29 : 30] I do that. It's a form. And it's not that there aren't forms in Christianity. It's just the form doesn't come first. The form follows.

I live by faith. I walk by faith. I walk by the Spirit. I walk for Christ. And so it's about a relationship. It's about a talking, trusting relationship.

And that's going to put me pretty much on the same road, but it's a whole different motivation and way of life than external living. It's not I, but Christ living in me.

He now becomes my strength and my power and enablement. It's not now me saying, okay, I got to do this. I got to buck up. I got to do this. I got to endure.

I just got to push. And I can do that for a while. I just need to mean it more, right? I just got to make a real promise this time.

[30 : 33] I got to really mean it this time. Then I'll stay on the road. 10 weeks later, 10 minutes later, it's like, I meant to.

Yeah, and that's good. Psalmist talks about that. I will do this. But there's also a recognition of vulnerability and weakness that I can't do this on my own.

This has to be by faith. It has to be by dependency on him. I live by faith. It's an active trust. That's my hobby horse. Active trust.

Faith isn't this thing that, okay, I made this, I have this belief and I committed myself to Christ and now it's kind of, now I'm on my own. He saved me, now I got to live a certain way. Well, I want to live a certain way because I've been saved, but the way I still live that way is the same way that I came to him, by trusting in him and applying my faith, an active trust.

trust. Abiding in Jesus to bear fruit. Remember that, it's that picture, to me, I love that picture of the branch and the vine, I'm connected to him.

[31 : 46] If I'm not connected to him in some living way, how am I going to bear fruit? A branch by itself trying to bear fruit is not, apart from me, Jesus, you can do nothing.

Oh, you're bearing stuff, but it's bearing stuff. Get it? Yeah, that's a good one. Write that one down. It just came. It must have been of the Spirit.

No, you're laughing, so it's not of the Spirit. Okay. Yeah, see, I love that picture because it helps connect for me. I'm a visual guy, so it's like I say, okay, I can see that, okay, my spiritual walk needs to be like that.

I need to be connected to him. I need to be drawing my strength from him. I'm not producing fruit, I'm bearing it. He's pushing it through me.

That's what to live as Christ is really all about. It's a daily walk. So I get my food, I get my food from him. I get my exercise, talking to him.

[32 : 54] Is that your focus? To live as Christ, is that your conviction? To live as Christ, is that your conviction? I want it to be. Lord, show me.

So that's his ultimate conviction and that's where he lives and so he can say, I will rejoice no matter what happens, whether I live or die, I will rejoice. Long as Christ is honored.

That's my ultimate. Okay, Paul, but how do you live day to day? So his ultimate conviction leads to a practical conviction. We see in verses 22 and following.

Now he's going to kind of work through this for us. Okay, that's where I am. That's what I want. Verse 22. So, so what if you live in the flesh? What if you die?

What, what are you going to do? So verse 22, if I am to live in the flesh, that means, okay, what does that mean? That means fruitful labor for me. Yet which to choose, I cannot tell.

[33 : 55] Actually, the word there is not choose. It's not as if he can choose, right? It's not really his choice. And it's not even really Nemo's, Nemo. Little Nemo.

That's what we'll call him. Little, he didn't seem so threatening then. Nero. It's not really even his choice. It's God's choice. So Paul's saying, what do I choose?

What do I choose? As if he's really choosing. And actually the word means prefer. What do I prefer? If I could choose, if I had a vote in the matter, you know, if it was just about me, what would I choose?

Well, I'll go be with Christ. That's what I choose. If it was only about me, that's what I would choose. But, so I, which to prefer, I can't tell.

I'm hard pressed between the two because both are good. To live is good because that's with you. To die, that's, oh, that's my desire to depart and be with Christ. That's far better. Literally, he says, it's much more better.

[35 : 01] It's terrible English, but great Greek. It's great Greek. Much more better. In Hebrew, it would be even better. Sorry, all right.

And then he goes, but to remain in the flesh is much, it is more necessary for your counsel. Here's how he weighs it out. So there's two possibilities, and he takes us through this process.

If I live, remain on the earth, that's good. That's good and fruitful work. But my personal preference, verse 23, is to depart and to be with Christ.

That's much more better. I'll be home. I'll be at home. In 2 Corinthians, he talks about to be present in the body is to be absent from Christ, but to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord.

Paul believed in a, at death, a present experience with Christ. He didn't talk about, oh, there's soul sleep, you know, and you got to wait until the resurrection and all that.

[36 : 08] It's like, well, wait a minute, because the resurrection, it talks about the body joining Christ is after the resurrection. So how do you work that out? You know, if in our time, you die here and the resurrection is over here, how can somebody who dies over here be present with the Lord when we're waiting for the resurrection?

Well, see, we're thinking about historical, chronological earth time. God's working from eternity time. And I really am attracted to the C.S. Lewis view of when we go here, it's the same time as here.

Because how can Paul say both? How can Jesus say, today, you'll be with me in paradise?

Well, no. No, it's, you got to go to sleep for a while, and then, you know, when that day comes, then you'll be raised with me. It's a mystery, but I got it figured out, so.

I hope I have it figured out. So, what's his priority? It's not an easy choice, he says in verse 23.

[37 : 23] It's hard to choose. Both are good. Priority? What's more necessary? See, so what does the choice come down to?

Here we have, I think, another one of those, what really matters. To live in the flesh, that's good. Good ministry, people. We love that.

Those are good things. God's got us here. As long as God's got us here, that's what he's got us here for. To love one another, share the gospel. But to be with Christ, that's better, right?

That's the ticket. That's the one I want. So, how does he know which is going to happen? Well, what really matters? Does what really matters, is what really matters what I want?

Or is what really matters what is needed? Do you know how to weigh needs and wants? I need things, and I want things.

[38 : 33] So I counsel young couples going into marriage about budgeting. Okay. So, you need things, and then you want things. How do you set your budget up? What takes precedent?

Things you need, or do you buy that want? I really want that. I want that more than I need this. Eh, but then, you know, you've got to eat.

Got to have shelter. So this is what Paul's thinking, too, in terms of needs and wants. Here, what I want, what I want, what I want, be with Christ. What you need, oh, what you need.

That takes precedence over what I want. What really matters are spiritual needs of others over my personal personal preferences.

That's his practical conviction. My ultimate conviction to live is Christ to die is gain. How does that work itself out in my life?

[39 : 41] Well, on a practical level, spiritual needs of others outstrip my personal preferences. That's how it works out. Needs over ones.

And it's not just a need over desire. It's a spiritual need of the church over personal preference. That's what Paul's saying.

It's your need. It's more necessary for you. What does that look like? Verse 25, convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all. Why? For your progress and joy in the faith.

Faith. So it's about a spiritual need. It's about spiritual progress of others. Outstrip my personal preference.

So can I get, can I meddle with you for a moment? I'm meddling with myself too. Do you make choices like that? Do you think like that?

[40 : 42] Spiritual needs of others over personal preference. What is natural for us to do is pick our personal preference. Okay, I'd rather stay home today. You know, I'm really tired. I'll catch the, I'll catch worship later.

I'm preaching to the choir here, right? But, and I'm not picking on anybody in particular. I just think, there are days where I think, I'd like to stay home today. Because I did a little work yesterday and I'm really sore.

And so, you know, standing for those hymns, I don't know. You know, we all think like that, right? So, so do I make choices?

Sometimes I do need to stay home. I'm not saying there's never a time for that, okay? But you know the difference. You know the difference. When am I making a personal preference, not need, a personal preference, over a spiritual need?

He called us to be a body so that we serve one another. And this is, this is a weird time to be talking about this. Because we can't all gather. And I recognize that. But are there ways we can still connect?

[41 : 57] And are there efforts I, I need to make because, yeah, this time gives me an excuse to just kind of take off.

And I'm worried about that as a pastor. Are there folks in our congregation that because, well, because, you know, I don't have to be there. I don't have to be there.

I don't have to be there. So, I'm just asking you to think about that.

Are there choices you make that are, no, this is the spiritual need. I need to go. It's not about me. I need to go.

Well, they don't need me. What's the difference last week when there was a bunch more people here? Are you not encouraged when there's more?

[43 : 01] I tell people all the time, you know what? When you're there, even though they sit quietly, when you're there, it makes a big difference to me. There are ways we minister to one another that aren't about, you know, oh, yeah, I see that.

And even Paul, you know, in this letter, we think about the distancing and we think about, you know, we can't be with one another in the ways that we're used to.

And in this letter, Paul's talking about that. I want to be with you later. In fact, I'm planning to come. He says that a couple times. He's going to say it here in verse 26 that because of my coming to you again, you know, you'll be encouraged because I'll be there in person.

There's something different about Paul communicating in person, don't you think, than Paul communicating in a letter? Now, his letters are powerful. His letters are carefully crafted. But I'm telling you, to hear Paul say what he says in the letters, to say it in person, it would have a much deeper impact because you're going to see this expression on his face.

You're going to see the tears in his eyes. You're going to hear his voice. It's going to make a different impression on you because when you read it, unless you knew him real personally, you're not going to, okay, how's he saying that?

[44 : 32] What's his tone? What's his tone of voice? And by the way, that's why I think we have to be really careful about our social media, what we say.

Because people can't hear how you're saying it. You might be meaning it with a joyful voice and they're hearing it with... Be really careful. Communication in person is a whole different thing.

And so Paul's anxious for that. He's looking forward to that. So his conclusion, verse 25, you know what?

I've reached a conclusion. I think we see him working through this and now verse 25, he says, yeah, that's it. Your need is more necessary than my preference.

So verse 25, I've become convinced of this and I know that I will remain and I will 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.

[45 : 45] My purpose is your progress. If I'm to live in the flesh, what am I doing? Well, it's all about you. It's your need and your need is to progress in the faith for you to continue to mature and grow.

And notice he says, for your progress in not a faith, not your progress in any kind of faith, but he says for your progress in the faith, which is a particular kind of faith, a specific faith, not just that you trust more, but that you have a certain set of beliefs that you progress in those beliefs.

What is our Christian faith? We say this is our Christian faith. What do we mean by that? Well, we mean it has something to do with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, has something to do with the gospel, has something to do with this body of Christ now on earth that lives together.

We have a set of beliefs. And so he's saying, I, my purpose is to see your progress in the faith, that you grow and mature in understanding those things that we essentially believe.

And then he adds what? Your joy. Your joy in the faith. So we're seeing Paul rejoicing. I'm joyful for this. I rejoice in this. I rejoice in that. Now he's saying, I'm here to see your progress and your joy in the faith.

[47 : 23] How do you have joy in the faith? Your joy in, so do you have joy in the faith of the Father?

What we believe about the Father. Does the Father ever give you joy? Well, yeah, he's so kind. He's the one that hears my prayers. How about joy in Jesus?

Yeah, there's no problem with that one. Joy in the Spirit? I don't know the Spirit that well. Well, he's with you. And he's the one that keeps pointing you to Jesus.

And that brings you joy, so the Spirit brings you joy. And by the way, when you came through something, that was the Spirit. When you endured that hard thing, that was the Spirit. When you have fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, that's called the fruit of the Spirit.

That's the Spirit. So, yeah. You have joy in the church. Oh, there's a touchy one. You have joy in the church. Well, it's part of our faith.

[48 : 39] You know, I don't always have joy in the church. Why? I don't know. No, why? I don't know. You know, I can tell you, truly, I have joy every Sunday morning seeing you.

It's my favorite day. I look forward to it. Now, as I admitted earlier, there are days where, okay, you know, I could pass today because I'm really tired. You know, and the 49ers are on.

No, I'm just teasing. Tape that. You can watch it later. Joy in the faith. Joy in those truths.

Delighting in who God is, who Christ is, what is our salvation, what the gospel is, what the church is. How do we progress in the faith?

And where do we experience joy in the faith? Ephesians 4. Paul gave the whole purpose of the church. He gave the purpose for his existence. For evangelist's existence, for pastors and teachers, for their existence.

[49 : 52] Why does God give to the church, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers? Why? What is their purpose? What is their function? He explains it in Ephesians 4. He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, or pastors, and teachers to do what?

What's their task? To equip the saints. To equip them in what way? To equip the saints for the work of ministry. So they do work of ministry.

You prepare them and help them and teach them how to do work of ministry. How to love other people, in other words. How to use their gifts. What's that for? For the building up of the body of Christ.

What's the goal in all of that? How long do we do that? Is that just something pastors do on the side? They do it in a class? No, they do it all the time. Equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ.

Until when? Until we attain to the unity of the faith. Unity of the faith.

[50 : 58] Those sets of truths. And, not just unity of those sets of truths, but also unity in the intimate knowledge of the Son of God. I love that balance.

Truth and heart relationship, walking with God. Unity in not just what we believe. Yeah, we believe in these things. What about, how's your intimate walk with Jesus? So united in that too.

That makes a great church, by the way. It's one thing that, yeah, we know what we believe and that's important. That keeps us, right, on the right road. But how's our walk with Jesus?

And the knowledge of the Son of God. That's walking with Him. To mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves, carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness and deceitful schemes.

See, if we're not doing, if pastors aren't doing their job of equipping the saints and teaching the faith and working toward that unity of the faith, what happens to the church?

[52 : 06] Every wind of doctrine. Tossed here and there. We're all over the place. What do we do? Why are we here? Oh, we're here for, you know, I don't know what they say.

Rather, we're speaking the truth in love. We are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body. How does the body grow, by the way?

How does the church grow? Well, you have to have these programs. You do? Well, yeah, that's how the big churches do it. No, that's great. I was in a big church once.

We had lots of programs. Big churches can be great. They can do things little churches can't do. But what does Paul say? How does the church grow?

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

[53 : 12] So how does it grow? I didn't see anything about programs there. It's when the whole body, each part doing its part, works and builds itself up.

How the body grows is when the members of the body are functioning. When we're all connected to the head and the head's saying to the hand, go reach out to that person.

The head's saying to the ear, go listen to that person. When the head is saying to the feet, walk over there. She's going to get food for the class.

I don't think I offended her. I don't. I saw these concerns. Oh, no. No, I'm just teasing.

This is the purpose of the church. This is the focus every week when we gather. This is why we emphasize the teaching of the word of God. We seek to equip, to prepare people, to serve one another so that the body's built up so that we experience growth, maturity, and joy with one another.

[54 : 33] So, how do we rejoice in an unknown future? How do we rejoice today? How do we think, handle, let alone, how do we rejoice in this time of social upheaval?

health epidemic? Where's our country going? It's a big election. Where's our country going? Where's our health going to be?

How are we going to get along with each other? I mean, we have some serious issues going on. And so, how do we think and rejoice in this unknown future?

What's ahead? We have hopes and dreams. How do we, no matter what happens, how do we find joy? It depends on your conviction of life.

What is your conviction? To live is what? For you. To live is family. Okay? And, nothing against family.

[55 : 48] I'm all for family. But if that's your conviction of, that's what all life depends on, what happens when you lose someone in your family? Is it, is that it?

Is that the end? Because we're all going to have those kind of experiences. We can't control that. If life is your career, what happens when the career tanks?

Or, someone comes in and changes how your career goes. A new corporate something. Well, you know, I live for amusement.

I live for the weekend. That's when I, you know, feel good. That's when I look forward to. Yeah? What happens when the epidemic grows and you can't go do what you want to do on the weekend?

Or, your finances get cut? Or, who knows what happens? See, what's your conviction? Is it Christ? To live is Christ.

[56 : 55] Is it Christ? Is Christ factor in all your decisions and all your choices? Is it your driving passion? Paul says, for the love of Christ controls us because we have concluded this.

One has died for all, therefore all have died. And he died for all. Why did Jesus die for all? So that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him.

who, for their sake, died and was raised. Christ did not die just to save you. He died to change your purpose in life so that you no longer live for yourselves but you live for him.

there's a missionary by the name of John Patton who was planning to go onto the mission field, go to the South Sea Islands and an older Christian came up to him and said, you know, why are you doing that?

You're going to be eaten by cannibals. And Patton replied, Mr. Dixon, you are advanced in years now and your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave.

[58 : 14] You know, you're not far yourself from the grave. There to be eaten by worms. Nice picture. Well, you said cannibals, I'm saying worms. So, I confess to you that if I can but live and die serving and honoring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I'm eaten by cannibals or by worms.

Going to be eaten either way. And in the great day of my resurrection, body will arise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen Redeemer.

Only one life will soon be passed. Only what's done for Christ will last. To live is Christ, to die is gain.

Let us pray. Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for this view of Paul and how he kind of thinks through how he's handling what's very, very pressing in his mind before him.

I mean, the ultimate of do I live or die? And so, Father, help us in these times to adopt and to catch that same conviction that he had that overrides no matter what the purpose, no matter what the future holds.

[59 : 39] That, Lord, to live is you and to die is gain overrides all of that. so teach us that. Gift us that.

Help us, Lord, as a body of Christ to encourage one another. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.