

# Immanuel Lutheran Mail Ministry



**Philippians 1:12-14; 19-30** *I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, <sup>13</sup> so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. <sup>14</sup> And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. . . . <sup>19</sup> for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. <sup>22</sup> If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. <sup>23</sup> I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. <sup>24</sup> But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. <sup>25</sup> Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, <sup>26</sup> so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again. <sup>27</sup> 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, <sup>28</sup> 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. <sup>29</sup> 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, <sup>30</sup> engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.*

What are you afraid of? Day after day the fears and anxieties in our country have been piling up, especially these days. As November 3<sup>rd</sup> approaches, fears about the Presidential election are mounting. Then there's COVID-19 fears—what happens if I get sick? What happens if mom or dad does? What if my work is forced to make cuts, and I lose my job?

Fear is tied to our self-will. There are many things in our lives that we want to control, that we have a will for, a desire for, and we feel that we are more-or-less in control of determining those outcomes. And then there are those times when all of that control is yanked away from us, and we realize that we really have no say in what happens. And when the illusion of “my control” is yanked away from me and what I desire doesn't matter, fear often takes root. So elections, health, job security—these types of things scare us because they are out of our control. Our self-will cannot determine their outcomes.

Now, as we read our text this morning, did you get the feeling that Paul was simply not struggling through these same sorts of fears? Certainly, he was a sinful human and had stuff he was afraid over, but in these particular words of comfort, there's no fear at all. There's only joy because by the grace of God, Paul was able to make this confident proclamation as his philosophy for life, a philosophy which will also serve as our sermon theme this morning:

**To live is Christ.**

**To die is gain.**

May God, by His grace, grant that to be our life's motto as well.

So often when people are suffering you hear them being comforted by others who say things like, “It will all turn out better for you.” Like, “Hey, your girlfriend dumped you? You’ll find a better one!” “You lost your job? You’ll find a better job!” “Your house was reked by a hurricane? I’m sure there’s a silver-lining here somewhere!” But that’s not Paul’s approach. Paul is writing this letter to the Philippians from prison. He’s in Rome, and he’s in jail because he was preaching about Jesus. That’s why he says, **“My imprisonment is for Christ.”** Nevertheless, even in chains, he is speaking cheerfully, and not because he has this generic hope that he’s going to get out and “things can only get better from here!”

He *is* confident that the Lord will allow him to leave, but that’s not what is lifting his spirits here. The real reason for Paul’s joy in the midst of this suffering is the progress of the Gospel. He can see all around Him the grace of God granting progress to all of his labors for Christ. He says, **“I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.”** There are people throughout time that have fought for progress with the understanding that they might die before they see the final results. Those who resisted the Nazis during the holocaust, they understood they might die, but they dreamt of a day when that evil would be overcome. Those who marched for civil rights in the 50’s and 60’s did so hoping for the day when their children and grandchildren could live in a world that they themselves might not live to see. Paul is fighting for something much better, the progress of good news of Jesus Christ crucified. He looks at his situation and says, “Look, I’m either going to die, or I’m going to live.” But He knows that either way, Christ will still be proclaimed.

And he points to his current situation as evidence: **“I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.”** In jail, he continued to preach so that everyone associated with the prison now knew the subject of his imprisonment. He says the whole imperial guard—which according to one commentator was about 2,000 soldiers—the whole imperial guard had heard about Christ, all because Paul was there with them. On top of that, Paul says that many other Christians who knew of his imprisonment were now invigorated to preach more boldly.

And so Paul looks at his situation and says, “Either/or! It doesn’t matter to me what happens.” He says in verse 20, **“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.”** If he dies, well then his death would be to honor Christ and serve as a catalyst for the rest of the Christian church, and if he lived then he would just continue right on preaching. He says, **“I am hard pressed between the two.”** You’ve heard of being stuck between a rock and a hard place, being stuck with two bad outcomes. Well, that’s the opposite of Paul’s situation. Even stuck in a prison cell, he says both outcomes are so good. It was a true win-win scenario. This was why Paul had hope, this was why Paul was so cheerful in his chains, because he understood that **“to live is Christ.”** That was the point of his whole life.

We said at the outset that our fear is tied to our self-will. When we have no control to exert our will, that’s usually when we are overcome by fear. Here Paul is in situation where he has no control at all, he’s in jail. But he also has no fear, because Paul understands that whether he lives or he dies, it’s all good! His philosophy for life was, **“To live is Christ.”** He wasn’t concerned about his own will, his own

goals, his own desires. He didn't say, "To live is Paul!" His desire was for Christ. He could leave all the rest in God's hands and live without fear, because whatever happened, Christ would reign.

In our lives, we get so easily consumed by our own hopes and expectations, our own plans, our own desires. We hope for this job, for this event, we expect this raise or that success. We have hopes and expectations for our kids, for our sports teams, for our homes, we have hopes over the number of people that will become members at our church! And when those things fail, that can have a devastating effect on us.

But the truth is, it's better for us to fail. Paul says in verse 29, ***"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."*** Literally, he says, "It has been granted to you." God's given you a gift of grace that is composed of two parts according to that verse: 1. Your faith. 2. Your suffering. And in tandem together, these truly are blessings from God. Because we need to be broken of our obsession with glory and success and personal gain. We need to be broken of our obsession with exerting our own self-will. God breaks us of these things by giving us faith and suffering together. Suffering is God's way of yanking away the illusion that we control our lives according *our* own will, and then faith brings us to trust in Christ and His will instead. Then God's words of comfort make sense, ***"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."*** Through suffering but having faith in Christ, we can say, ***"When I am weak, then I am strong."*** (2 Corinthians 12:9-10) Because I can trust in God.

In Him we find the perfect will for our lives. As Paul declares, ***"God our Savior. . . desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."*** (1 Timothy 2:3) He who is life from death has given you life from death. He forgives your obsession with your own glory and success. And by this, He casts out fear. Because He's already forgiven your sins. When you were baptized, that was God sealing you with the name that is above every name. When you partake of the Lord's Supper, that is God's promise to you that eternal life is personally yours. And so there's no reason to fear. Because our ultimate goal, our inheritance, our hope—it's all safe with Him. It's out of our control and safely under his control. No one can take these things from you, there's nothing to fear. ***"For to live is Christ."***

***"And to die is gain."*** I think everyone has a go-to feel-good movie that they like to watch. For me, one of the feel-good movies that I really enjoy is this movie called, "Big Fish." At the beginning of the movie the main character, Edward Bloom, he and a few other kids see visions of how each of them are going to die. This knowledge is terrifying and crippling for the other kids, but it emboldens Edward. It makes him courageous and daring, unafraid in every situation because he knows every time he meets some new dangerous life-threatening situation, he can say, "This isn't how I go." He already knows how he's going to die, and that allows him to live in every other situation without fear.

The same is true for Paul and every Christian, including you and me. ***"To live is Christ and to die is gain."*** Paul writes elsewhere in Scripture, ***"You have already died and your true life is hidden with Christ in God."*** (Colossians 3:3) Our world lives in fear of death. So much of what we do by nature is focused on avoiding death and squeezing as much out of life as we can. Certainly, the world does not view death as gain. What do we say when someone has a loved one who passes away? "I'm sorry for your loss." And certainly, it is a loss for the one still here in this life, but for the one who dies in Christ Jesus, it's

not a loss at all. For them, ***“To die is gain.”*** As Paul says, ***“My desire is to depart and be with the Lord, for that is far better.”***

Paul knows this to be true. By the grace of God, he’d already died with Christ. All of his sins had been upon Christ’s shoulders as He was nailed to the cross, and there they were forgiven. Victory, the crown of life, eternal peace and rest—it was all waiting for Him in heaven. Paul knew that he had died with Christ, that he’d been buried with him, and he knew that he would rise with him too. And so as he thought about his possible death, he wasn’t scared. He knew what death would mean. And so do you. Because you also have died with Christ. ***“For you were buried with Him, through baptism, into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so you also should walk in newness of life.”*** (Romans 6:4) Being convinced of this, you can live without fear.

Paul tells us what that type of living looks like starting in verse 27: ***“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.”***

Have you ever watched one of those movies where the bad guy has the good guy trapped, and he thinks he’s won. He thinks he’s out plotted him and outmaneuvered him. And then the good guy smiles. He smiles because he knows something the bad guy doesn’t know; he knows the tables are about to turn.

That’s the same confidence and boldness that we can have from knowing what Paul knows. ***“To die is gain.”*** Death is the very worst thing that this world can threaten us with in its battle against Christ and His word, but God’s turned the tables on the world. Death is no longer something to fear. We already know that it is far better to depart and be with the Lord. So in the face of persecution, we can smile. For us, we have the joy of this either/or philosophy. Either I am blessed with another day with which I can serve the Lord, or I die and will be with the Lord eternally!

“One way or the other.” That’s the prevailing theme throughout this text. It’s kind of like in sports. Sports are all about matchups, you have the offense matched up against the defense. And so the goal of the offense in nearly every sport is to create mismatches. If the defense counters with this, I’m going to counter with this and create a mismatch. One way or the other, the offense has the advantage. And it’s the same with us. One way or another. In every situation, no matter what happens, God gets the mismatch. Whether we live or we die, He will use that situation by His grace. No matter what happens, Christ remains our Savior. He remains our all in all. ***“For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.”*** (Romans 14:8)

So what are you afraid of? It doesn’t matter if things are out of your control, because they are in God’s control. Your life is not your house, or your job, or your success, or your glory. So who cares if you can’t control those things! Your life is Christ. Lives tied up into His, you’ll never be disappointed. And so there’s no reason for fear. For to live is Christ. And to die is gain. Amen.

***“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*** (Philippians 4:7) Amen.

Pastor Sam Rodebaugh  
Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity  
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