

Phil. 1:19-26

## Between a Rock and a Hard Joy

Theme: Christ's mission enables us to discover the joy that is the strength to really live.

### I. The Need for Joy (v. 20)

- A. So We Need Not Be Ashamed
- B. So Christ Not Be Dishonored

### II. The Fuel for Joy (v. 19)

- A. Your Prayers
- B. Christ's Spirit

### III. The Life of Joy: "Christ" (v. 21)

"To Live is Christ" means that we have:

- A. Christ's Identity (v. 21a)
- B. Christ's Perception (v. 21a)
- C. Christ's Purpose (vv. 22-25)
- D. Christ's Power (v. 26)

### IV. The Hope of Joy: "To Die is Gain" (v. 21)

- A. Nothing Between Us and Christ
- B. Nothing Denying Us Glory with Christ

Conclusion

Morning roll call in the Nazi concentration camp at Ravensbrück <sup>in Northern Germany</sup> was itself torture. Corrie Ten Boom, the Dutch daughter of a doctor imprisoned for harboring Jews in their home, described a particularly horrible day: "By 4:30 A.M. we had to be outside our barracks in the pre-dawn winter chill. Roll call sometimes lasted three hours. Standing in the icy-cold, grey dawn, Corrie would repeat Scripture through shivering lips: 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine or nakedness, or peril, or sword.... No, in all these, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.'"

But there came a time when repeating the words did not help. "The woman directly in front of me sank to the ground." The guards began to beat the woman with unbridled rage. "I could hardly bear to see what was happening in front of me, this is the end of us all, I thought. Then suddenly a skylark songbird started to sing high in the sky. The sweet, pure notes of the bird rose on the still cold air. Every head turned upward, away from the carnage before us. Listening to the song of the skylark rising over the crematorium (where tens of thousands were turned to ash), the words of the Psalmist ran through my mind:

"For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is God's mercy toward those who fear him."

I understood the reality of God's love was just as sure as the cruelty of men. Every morning for the next three weeks just at the time of the roll call the skylark appeared. In his sweet song, I heard the call of God to turn my eyes away from the cruelty of men to the ocean of God's love.

The ocean of God's love was the heavenly promise and peace that beckoned her from earth's cruelties to Christ's embrace. It was the spiritual reality that gave hope and peace, but also introduced an awful question: Why not go now? The everlasting warmth of heaven <sup>was</sup> just beyond death's door?

Surely that hard gateway was better than the prison of <sup>inhuman</sup> cruelty? On the one hand eternal rest on the other hand daily suffering, trial, uncertainty and cruelty.

It is the same question believers in every era face when suffering through crisis, addiction, disease, shattered relationships, lost significance, and <sup>Why not go? why not leave it all behind?</sup>

Paul is in precisely the same situation. Prison or Heaven; prison or heaven? I am between a rock and a heavenly place?

Why is there <sup>even</sup> a choice to be made? Because there is a mission to be fulfilled for Christ's sake. A mission that actually challenges Corrie & Paul & us to discover joy that is strength to live <sup>really live!</sup>

*To become known as the Hyena, the Beast of Ravensbrück*

*sadness*

*strength to live really live!*

# I. The Need for Joy (v. 20)

Paul describes in vs. 20, the need is

## A. Not to Be Ashamed (20a)

- by wilting w/o courage
- by letting threat with steal testimony

## B. So That Christ Not be Dishonored (20b)

- by life > in Paul's body, Christ's purposes fulfilled
- by death

The great joy of every believer is to know that our flesh is a candle in the hand of God, showing his light in darkness whether by the life we live or the death we die that testifies to the reality and goodness of Christ.

Before supervisor or spouse or co-worker or neighbor our lives are shining if we do not wilt in testimony despite threats or intimidation, our own fear, or fatigue, to be filled up with joy. But where is the fuel for such joy in a fallen world?

# II. The Fuel of Joy (v. 19) - already described

## A. Your Prayers (19a)

## B. Christ's Spirit (19b) - The Holy Spirit that testifies of Christ (Jn. 16)

∴ Paul says that human prayer and the Holy Spirit will work for his deliverance - a "salvation" (in Greek) that does not necessarily mean release from prison, but preservation for God's purpose by life or by death.

In this Paul echoes the word he will later write back to the church at Rome, (Rom 8:28)

- We don't know how to pray, so the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with groanings too deep to utter - and He who knows the mind of the Spirit acts in accord with God's will, so that all things work together... (Rom 8:26-28)

By prayer we are co-creators of the heavenly purposes of God on earth. This is the source of our joy and courage. I am not merely a candle by contraction create of the reality of heaven as I lift burdens of earth to Him. Our prayers confused & uncertain are glogged into the icy tunnels of the bakery of God and the Holy Spirit is the decorator tip that brings out the designs of eternal purpose.

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Standing in line for entrance into the concentration camp, Corrie watched as guards removed every possession of the women ahead of her in line. She had a small Bible designed for those working in the underground and prayed that God would send his angels to shield the Bible from sight. They said, "I thought with honor, angels are transparent; the guards will see right through them." But the woman in front of her created a commotion. The guards focused on that woman and pushed her through the entrance. She still had the Bible - and fresh joy and fresh courage fueled by prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit. Both would be needed for the purposes of Joy that she and every believer have.

What does God intend for a life filled with Christ's purposes and fueled by prayer and the Holy Spirit?

The Answer is vs. 21

- + Some have said the climax verse of the entire New Testament
- + Most see one of the most precious summaries of the Gospel in a dozen words
- + Martin Lloyd Jones says it is so perfectly balanced a statement of the Gospel that to touch it is to spoil it, as it we should recognize it is Holy Ground we walk to consider it, but it is the Holy Ground God intends for us to walk, so take off your sandals of pride, or shame, or distraction and come walk w/ me on this Holy Ground.

What Does God intend for a life <sup>Christ's</sup> filled w/ purpose & fuel by <sup>Spirit's</sup> prayer?

How can we live for such purposes in a fallen world w/ broken people?

### D. Christ's Power

Because Christ is within, "You may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again (vs. 26). Paul may die, but if he returns to whom will there be credit. Those at Philippi will glory in Christ Jesus." Paul's union w/ Christ is so complete Christ all around and within that the glory will go all to Christ. For us the reality is that ~~our strength and power to live for him~~ is by him.

Carrie Ten Boom <sup>having survived</sup> how did a small little girl like me survive? How did the Lord use our family to save 800 Jews. How did one so hurt and betrayed learn to forgive? How did a little old woman write of her experience in such a way that she would speak of Christ's love in thousands of churches in scores of countries. She said, When you see a glove used to perform a task, you know the power is not in the glove but the hand that fits it. I have my brown glove, the power is Christ."

The talk of Carrie Ten Boom that I listened to this week was recorded over 40 years ago, during the term of President Nixon. In her talk she urged Christians to pray for the president's success in opening up China to relations with the West, and then to pray that God would send believers from this country to help Christians under persecution in China. At first I thought that's an interesting history lesson; then I remembered 4 weeks ago I was in China visiting <sup>hardship</sup> prison pastors of the underground church. Could my efforts, your generosity in sending me to the consequence of a little old lady with a third accent asking God's people to pray 40 years ago. We are the glove, he is the hand working. To live is Christ.

Such realities, such power, such treasure of <sup>identity, perception, purpose & power</sup> yield amazing hope in the midst of hard lives.

The hope we have is beyond the bounds of ordinary identity, perception, purpose, power and hope. This hope is beyond the bounds of life itself. Which is why, when we believe To Live is Christ, we also have Christ's hope.

Trust is faith present. Hope is faith future. To have hope; not only means to live is Christ but...

What does God intend for a <sup>joyful</sup> life filled w/ purpose & fueled by prayer?

### III, To Live (is) Christ (v. 21)

To put it in words we understand is already to spoil it; just a bit. There is no "is" (no being verb) in the Greek. The sentence simply reads; "To Live - Christ," as though for the believer filled w/ purpose and fueled by prayer, we enter a new reality, beyond the everyday looking glass of this world. ~~Reflecting~~ its realities to us we cross over beyond the glass from temporal earthly realities, and suddenly, amazingly - "For me to live Christ" What does that mean? Here the Gospel compresses like atoms being absorbed into a black hole only to gather into energy for a quantum explosion of Gospel light. For our life to be "Christ," means to have:

#### A. Christ's Identity

English soccer star turned broadcaster to a billion people of world Cup. "Soccer was my God. If I played well... I was rich. If I played poorly, I was [low]. My sense of well being depended entirely on my performance. [Finally] I recognized the biggest obstacle to happiness was that soccer was king. Instead of Jesus... My heart still burned for soccer but it burned for Jesus more."

Because he died to take the penalty for my sin, I live with his righteous status (vs. 20)

"My sins have been taken away," said Corrie Ten Boom, thrown into the midst of the sea with a "No Fishing" sign posted on the shore. "No longer does sin & shame mark me. Christ is my life" (Col. 3:4, Gal. 2:20) "I am crucified."

Corrie Ten Boom's struggle of unforgiveness; the man who after being helped, betrayed her family leading to the death of Father, Mother, sister & the women. The guards who tortured the women. The Christian couple who joined her in church work and then took advantage of her for their gain. But knowing Christ forgave, she forgave so Christ lives in her - she knew & reflected him.

#### B. Christ's Perception

Because Christ lives, I see his hand at work all around me. (vs. 20) <sup>My hope... now as always</sup> "Christ will be honored in my body" When Corrie Ten Boom entered the dormitory built for 200 but occupied by 800 the lice infestation became awful and led to disease. But because of the lice the guards would not enter the building and the women had respite from abuse and indignity. She would recall the angels that somehow protected her Bible and the lice that protected their bodies and saw in angels and lice and a sign, Christ all around. As St. Patrick wrote centuries before Christ behind bars, always all around: "To live is to see Christ"

#### C. Christ's Purpose

Because Christ all around, his purposes are ours. To live is Christ is to live for Him. Skeptics with good logic ask, "This is Christ - Prison for Paul, Concentration camp suffering for Corrie, suffering in this world for all you Christians. If you really believe in your heaven, why not just escape all of this? Paul's answer (vs. 22-25),

Because of the lice and the Bible in that camp of suffering, the women had Bible studies 2x a day. Corrie said, "I saw thousands of people in any number with the name of Jesus on their lips." Why fight for life in hospital, fight for a marriage to a difficult person,

Phil. 1:12-13, 25 - "I want to live" between why (vs. 25) - "I want to live"

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Christ's Hope =  
IV. The Hope of Joy!  
"To Die is Gain" (v. 216)

Without faith this sounds only morbid. Like the words of the poet Percy Shelley, who like so many of the artists of our world perceived the blackness, the sordid and the misery with insight, not distracted by money, sex and power. Seeing life for the misery it really holds, he wrote "I have often called death sweet names." Is that all the apostle is doing - just calling death sweet names to escape life? No. He is rejoicing in hope. Already he knows the wonder of ~~the~~ To Live is Christ.

But the identity, perception, purpose and power of that reality is still clouded by the miseries and hurts of a fallen world. But what if earth did not get in the way? What if there were no fog on the glass? What if there were nothing between us and Christ.

Please do not think of heaven as gaining your personal angel wings to fly a hazy or your personal clouds.

Heaven is earth made perfect. All the joys, all the wonders, all the relationships, all our bodies, ~~all our thoughts~~ made perfect. - and nothing between us and Christ. We are the skylark with the savior and nothing between!

The only thing hold Paul back from seeking that immediately is the purpose of fulfilling Christ's desire that others would know it. But the gains of the heavenly reality are actually giving him power to live past all the present hurt.

I think of the old preacher's story of the man hanging over the boat rail - green & suffering from sea sickness. Another tried to comfort him saying, "I know it feels terrible, but I want you to know no one dies from sea sickness." Replied the one hanging over the rail, "Don't tell me that. It's the hope of dying that's keeping me alive."

It is the hope of glory that keeps us living. This world holds no ultimate threat, no final chapter, no power over my ~~30th~~ soul.

Conch

The hope of glory which is not fanciful or silly cartoon defined, but holds the sure promise of sin gone, tears removed, loved ones re-united and Christ with nothing between eternally - is what enables us to live fully and joyfully even in hardship.  
From Tramp for the Lord, pp. 84-86.

Carrie Ten Boom talk of her Ravensbrück experience and the skylark that gave life by renewing her hope in heaven in many places and books, but no time was more compelling than when she told it in a prison in Rowanda, Africa. She said it was the dreariest, darkest prison she had ever seen - and remember she has "seen" Ravensbrück.

The men sat in mud, their legs caked in mud up to their knees, steam rising from the mud around them in the tropical heat.

Why not go in a building for protection from the sun? "Inyasside," said the interpreter. No way there to protect a little old lady from the men.

"I looked into their faces," wrote Carrie. "It was the look I'd seen so many times in Ravensbrück - despair, hopelessness, anger... What could I, an old Dutch woman, say to these miserable men that would help their lives?"

She asked the Lord to give her a verse. The one that came to mind was the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy & peace.

"Even as I spoke the words... I felt more joy than I have ever felt. It poured out like a river from my inner being - like a rising tide it turned the ugly mud of despair into a shimmering lagoon of blessing."

... The prisoners sat staring at me with hatred. The steam rose around them, and the stinging insects swarmed their mud-coated legs and ankles.

I began to talk of the joy that is ours when [Jesus is our life]. What a friend we have in Him. He is always with us, He forgives us, He gives us strength to be good. When we hurt, He tells us with forgiveness. When we are afraid, He helps us love.

Several faces began to soften. My joy was spilling over on them. But others were thinking, "After your talk, you go home. We stay in this stinking mud. It is easy to talk about joy, when you are free."

So she told them of joy, when she was not free. She told them of Ravensbrück and the skylark that reminded her of the life more real & enduring than the mud & misery of whatever imprisons us. The reality of God's love was as sure as the cruelty of man, when Christ lives in your heart, <sup>He who is willing to raise your head.</sup> guards raised their hands. As she left the interpreter told Carrie

Carrie Ten Boom's story is so powerful. Jesus, "It is to die is more sweet than to live is Christ. And that is joy now & forever." "old woman, come back again and tell us more about Jesus." "So why live? Because to live is Christ." "What they started to say."