

## Finding Joy in Life and Death

*Unstoppable Joy, Philippians 1:21-30*

### Introduction

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- When I was in high school, I had a group of guys from my youth group that would meet at my house for Bible study. My youth leader was a great guy named Jeff, and he would come over and lead the study for us each week. The only problem was that Jeff was afraid of dogs. We didn't have a Great Dane, German Shepherd, or even a Golden Retriever; we had a Long-haired Chihuahua! It didn't matter if she was only foot tall and weighed less than a sack of potatoes; he was not coming into my house unless our dog was shut up in another room.
  - Studies suggest that only about 5% of Americans are afraid of dogs.
  - The 3 most common fears in our country are fear of heights, fear of public speaking, and fear of death.
  - This last one, death, is a difficult topic for many people.
    - It seems like the worst possible event for those who have given themselves to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."
    - It's something we try to distance ourselves from as much as possible.
- The Apostle Paul doesn't avoid the topic of death & dying, but leans into it in his inspired letter to the Philippians. (Read passage).
  - Paul was in jail awaiting trial, & his life was very much up in the air.
  - The punishment for sedition, or inciting a rebellion, was almost always death in ancient Rome.
  - And yet, Paul writes this letter with the tone of unstoppable joy!
- In the extended introduction to his beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, we find the key to joy in what may be the biggest joy-killer of all – death. **The key to finding joy in death is by living for Jesus Christ.**
  - This is much easier said than done, but Paul's personal words to the Philippians give us 3 ways to just that.
  - After we explore them, we'll talk about...

### Body

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#### I. ADOPT THIS PARADIGM - LIFE IS MINISTRY AND DEATH IS A PROMOTION. (v. 21-22a)

- A. What is a paradigm?
1. It's a mindset, a perspective, a set of assumptions, the way someone views the world.
  2. We've had some paradigm shifts in the areas of health & technology.
    - a. Like when Louis Pasteur discovered the germ theory in the 1800's
    - b. Like when astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin landed on the moon in 1969.
    - c. Like when Motorola & Bell Labs produced the 1<sup>st</sup> mobile phone in the early 80's.

3. True wisdom comes from adopting paradigms that match the Bible and the way God has revealed Himself to use there.
- B. "Life is ministry"
1. Paul equated living life with doing ministry for Jesus Christ.
  2. To live *is* fruitful labor for me
  3. Jesus Christ became his:
    - a. Motivation for action.
    - b. Goals for life.
    - c. Source of strength.
- C. "Death is a promotion."
1. Paul talks about gain and loss in 3:1-11.
    - a. He had every reason to brag about his achievements.
    - b. Those things were all a "loss" compared to the "gain" of knowing Christ – a knowledge that can only be completed through death. (3:7)
  2. For those who live their lives focused on Jesus, death is a good thing.
  3. This is the opposite of those who live their lives focused on themselves.
- II. EMBRACE THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN LIFE & DEATH. (vv. 22b-24)
- A. Paul seemed to struggle with the choice between life and death
1. "I do not know what to choose" - "hard-pressed."
  2. We know that the choice wasn't really his; it was God's choice.
- B. Paul acknowledged the benefits of both sides
1. The benefit of death is getting to be with Christ, and other believers who have gone ahead into eternity.
  2. The benefit of life is continuing to minister to others.
- C. We try, naturally, to eliminate conflicts, tensions, and struggles from our lives, but this struggle is good. Without it, we're too settled.
- III. WORK FOR THE SPIRITUAL GROWTH OF OTHERS (v. 25-30)
- A. Paul was focused on 3 specific areas of growth.
1. That they would stand firm against divisions (v. 27).
  2. That they would stand firm against opposition from outside (v. 28)
  3. That they would stand up from Christ (v. 29-30)
- B. Paul followed Christ's example of servant leadership. He worked to support himself, he adapted to various cultural situations, and he ministered at great risk to his own safety. He was not in it for himself.

### Conclusion

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- Today, we've talked about **living for Jesus** as a way to **find joy in the face of death**, and we've taken note of 3 ways to do just that.
- Death can still be a topic to deal with, but it doesn't have to be something we're afraid of or something that steals our joy in life.
- Death is an invitation to eternal life, a life that starts now through faith in Jesus Christ and continues past natural death on into eternity.