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**“Can’t Lose”**  
**Philippians 1:18b-26**  
**Pastor Peter Yi**  
**February 7, 2021**

**(Philippians 1:18b-26)**

But 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.

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, <sup>19</sup> for 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. <sup>20</sup> I 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. <sup>21</sup> For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. <sup>22</sup> If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! <sup>23</sup> I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; <sup>24</sup> but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. <sup>25</sup> 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, <sup>26</sup> so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.

Now, I might be a bit biased, but I think the pastor’s job is the most important job in the world. How did I come to such a conclusion? Well, the first thing you’d have to do is to look at what a pastor does. There are a lot of things a pastor does. The pastor’s a teacher, teaching the word of God. That’s probably the most important task a pastor is assigned to do. The pastor is to pray. In addition to that, modern and not so modern churches have added other things to the pastor’s job description like van driver, custodian. Sometimes people think of a pastor as a CEO of an organization or a manager of a group of people. That’s not what makes a pastor’s job the greatest job. I believe the pastor’s job is the most important job because perhaps only the pastor has as his job description to help people to live well and to die well. Most all jobs, even that of a physician, is to help people live well, but few jobs, perhaps only the job of a pastor helps people to die well. I don’t think my definition is incorrect. The pastor’s job, in being a pastor, a shepherd is to help God’s people live for God, in every area of their lives, like work and family, and at the same time, the pastor job includes helping people to die well, to die for God, to get people ready and looking forward to meeting God.

That’s what today’s passage addresses. What does it mean to live for God and what does it mean to die for God? Those are the two major segments of a person’s life. Living and dying. All of us spend most of our time focusing on the living part and hardly any time thinking about the dying part. You might think that it makes sense that we have that disproportion since the vast portion of our time here on earth is spent on the living aspect, and perhaps only the last couple of years or even months are spent on actually dying.

Now, that would make sense if the totality of our lives was just the 80 or so years that we live before we die, but that's not what the Bible teaches, that's not what Christians believe. We believe that these 80 years we live on the earth are a drop in the bucket of a life that goes on for eternity. The 80 years that we live, important as they are, will seem almost like nothing, when we compare it to a future that knows no end. This is the life that comes after we die when our souls go to heaven. Then after that when Jesus returns, our souls will be reunited with incorruptible, imperishable glorious bodies, and we will reign in the new heavens and new earth with Christ forever and ever.

So, when we look at life from that perspective, we actually should be spending a lot more time preparing ourselves for eternity, rather than life here and now. I share all this so that our perspectives will be challenged. Yes, what we do now is very important and matters to God. Getting an education, getting married, having a family, working at your job; these are all very important things. But eternity is even more important. What happens after we die is even more important and precious than what happens now. Maybe this story can help us see the relationship between this world and the next world; between life now and life after we die.

About ten years ago there was an event in our city. It was a Christian event at a large venue. It might have been the Air Canada Centre. It was a worship, praise event, where Christians of all stripes were invited to participate. Now, I didn't attend the event, but what really caught my attention was the title. It was called "Heaven's Rehearsal." Think of what a rehearsal is. It's a practice session. Actors in a play do a rehearsal. Musicians in a band do a rehearsal. During the rehearsal, the actors are actually acting and the musicians are really playing. But it is a practice for the main event before a live audience. Christian life in one sense is a rehearsal for the main event, when we get to heaven. Life in the here and now is real living, just like the actors and musicians, but it is a preparation for real show, the real performance, when we see God in heaven.

This is what makes Christianity a win-win proposal. Living is a win; and dying is a win. There is no losing hand for those who are in Christ. We're in a can't lose situation. This sets the stage for today's passage.

**The way we live a can't lose life is to make the exaltation of Christ our highest goal.**  
(v20)

Paul is imprisoned in Rome because of his allegiance to Jesus Christ. What we might think was a huge setback to the ministry of the Gospel, actually turned out to be an opportunity for Gospel advancement. If the Gospel is being preached and is advancing, then Paul is happy, and he rejoices. That's how the previous section ends and that's also how this section begins. Paul rejoices over the preaching of the Gospel, and he continues to rejoice despite the situation he's in now.

Paul states in verse 20, "I 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. He's not certain what the outcome of his imprisonment will be. It can tilt either way. It may be that he is sentenced, convicted and then executed and he will die. Or it may be that he is released. Paul is not 100% certain what the outcome will be though he is leaning toward being released. You can see that in verse 25, but regardless of what happens, death or life, his only concern is that Christ will be exalted.

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The word for exalted can also mean magnify or to enlarge. When we look at something through a magnifying glass, the little ant crawling on the ground becomes a giant monster. What Paul desires is that Christ would be enlarged, that Christ would be magnified.

Since that's his goal he eagerly expects and hopes that he will in no way be ashamed of Christ. It would be hard to magnify Christ if we were ashamed of Christ. Sometimes we wonder how Paul could speak about being ashamed of Christ here and in Romans 1:16 where he says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel." Surely Paul is no different from us. We are tempted to deny Christ in certain situations, especially when our very lives are on the line. Even Jesus in his temptations was challenged by Satan to deny God, to deny God's plan, to deny his identity in God, to deny God's provision for him and so on. So if Jesus was tempted that way, it's no surprise that Paul was tempted in that way, and thus it's no surprise that we are tempted in that way. Living a life that desires to exalt Christ will come with challenges and temptations to deny Christ and be ashamed of Christ.

The flipside of being ashamed is courage. So, on one hand Paul hopes he won't be ashamed and on the other hand he hopes he will have courage. We need courage to face persecution. We need courage to stand firm when the culture around us is hostile to Christ. We need courage if we are ever pressured into denying Christ. Not being ashamed and having courage are needed to live a life that exalts Christ, but why should we have the exaltation of Christ as our greatest goal? We can answer that several ways.

One reason is because Christ is the greatest being. If he is the greatest being, the most important being, then he should be our greatest goal.

Another reason is because Christ achieved the greatest thing, the greatest accomplishment. He secured the salvation of sinners by living in perfect obedience to God's commands, and by dying in our place as a substitution for our sins. No other person, no other being, not the most noble or righteous person could accomplish what he did.

A final reason is because he did this for you, and for me. It's one thing that he did it. It's another thing that he did it for you. That Jesus died for sins is a great feat indeed, but that he did it for me, for you, makes it totally different. Do you believe Jesus died for you? Then exalting him should be your greatest goal, in your living and in your dying.

**Paul then goes on to tell us more deeply about the differences and similarities between living and dying, as one who desires only to exalt Christ.**

He's already said, "in my body, Christ will be exalted, whether by life or by death." But now in verse 21 he says, "for to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." He holds up before himself two options. The first option is to go on living and the other is for his life to end in death.

Now, there's something a bit odd about his opening line, because it seems to go against what comes next. He says that to live is Christ, but then later he says that he desires to depart and to be with Christ. So, which is it? Is living Christ or is dying Christ? The answer to Paul is, "YES!" To live is Christ and to die is Christ. That means that if God decides that his imprisonment doesn't end in death, and he goes on living, then it's Christ. If he goes on living then his living will be for Christ, and in Christ. He will continue to labour for Christ in sharing and proclaiming the Gospel. Every day that he breathes, every day that he lives, is another opportunity to serve his Saviour, in helping others hear about him and trust in him.

Later in verse 25 he elaborates on this saying, “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.” Paul’s labour is not only for the further expansion of the Gospel in distant lands among people who’ve never heard it before, his labour is also to help those who are already Christian to continue to grow in their faith. This made me think of a mission organization who had a vision statement that went like this, “To know Christ and make him known.” That is the goal of every Christian. Progressing in our faith is by knowing Christ more, and knowing his word, and becoming more like him. At the same time, it’s also introducing Christ to others, making Christ known.

Paul then adds another key component to our lives as Christians, it’s joy. A joyless Christian life is not a Christian life. Joy is not like the optional dessert that you order after a meal, if you have a bit of room in your stomach. Look at what Paul writes. It’s not merely progress in the faith. And it’s not merely joy in the faith. It’s progress and joy in the faith. One commentator explained it like this. “Progress without joy is spurious; joy without progress is counterfeit.” (Hansen). He means that to have one without the other is to have a fake religion.

This is really important for us to grasp, whether it applies to us, or to the ministry in which we are involved. As a Christian, as you work toward maturity, are you working toward both progress and joy in the faith? Or are we focusing on one while ignoring the other? And as we help others grow in the faith, the same questions apply? Am I working toward both the progress and joy in the faith of the person I’m ministering to?

So, that’s what living for Christ is all about. It’s to live for Him, not for ourselves. It’s to advance his name, not my name. It’s to work toward progress and joy in the faith, for me and for others.

The first choice was to go on living. Let’s now look to the other choice, dying.

Paul tells us that dying is gain. He says, dying means that he will be with Christ, which is better by far. How is that so? How is dying gain? Well, gain is the opposite of loss. It’s similar to the word “profit”. In a financial sense we want our investments to incur profits, not losses. The same sense is implied here. To die is not really a loss at all. The only loss is that there is no more opportunity to do Gospel ministry. Gospel ministry can only be done while living. Our one life is the only opportunity we have to do this. That’s the only loss in dying. He’s not thinking, but I won’t be living in my nice house anymore or driving my nice car anymore or collecting nice purses anymore or working on my career anymore or dining at nice restaurants anymore. What a shame, what a loss. None of things are a loss to Paul. His only sense of loss is that he will no longer be able to serve the Lord in this earthly capacity. Everything else is gain.

So, what do you gain in dying? Well, several things.

In dying we get to rest from our earthly labours.

In dying you get to die no more. Man is destined to die once, and only once. And after that we live forever.

In dying we no longer face the impact of sin. Sin has such a broad and comprehensive impact upon our lives. There is no realm of humanity where sin and its effects are not found. Look at the workplace, in government, in the family, in education, everywhere, sin has left its mark. Wherever you find people, you will find sin and the effects of sin. But after we die, sin will be no more. There will be no more sin in our own hearts and minds. And there will be no more sin in the new realm you occupy.

That's why dying is gain, but it's not just the absence of sin that makes dying so much better, it's the presence of love. When we go to heaven, we will be in a place where all we will know are the perfections of love. We know love now, but it's so inferior to the love we will know in heaven. Paul speaks of this perfect love in 1 Corinthians 13. We tend to focus on all the descriptions of love—love is patient, love is kind and so on—but that's just a part of it. In verse 8, Paul says this.

**(1Corinthians 13:8)** Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. <sup>9</sup> For we know in part and we prophesy in part, <sup>10</sup> but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. <sup>12</sup> For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

In heaven, there will be a fullness to love, a completion of love, a perfection of love, that we only get a taste of here. Listen to how Jonathan Edwards explains it in his sermon, "Heaven is a World of Love." He says that in heaven, we are now at the source, or the fountain of love. We are in the presence of the God of love. All that will emanate from God is love toward us. Then Edwards says that we shall finally be perfectly lovely, because we will no longer have the stain of sin in us. He says that in heaven, there are only lovely objects. There is nothing unlovely there. Also, our capacity for to give and receive love will be greatly increased. Nothing will be able to hinder us from giving and receiving love from God or from one another. I think that's why Jesus says that in heaven, there will be no more marriage. On earth, among our earthly relationships, it's within marriage where we can experience the deepest expressions of love, but once we are in heaven, our love in marriage will seem like nothing. Our deepest friendships on earth will seem like nothing, compared to the love we share in heaven.

These are two things that will make dying gain, but there is one thing that stands above everything else, and Paul tells us what that is. We will be with Christ.

Well, he tells us specifically what the great gain is, It's to be with Christ. At first it might seem pretty simple to understand what 'being with Christ' means. It means to be in the presence of Christ, right? If you're away from someone you love, you can't wait until you are with them again. That's what 'being with Christ' means, right? Well, sort of. That's definitely part of it, but not all of it. What else does it mean? Well it all comes to what Paul means when he says "with Christ". It's actually a phrase that he uses repeatedly throughout his writings. One commentator says this. "Paul is speaking primarily here about being with Christ in death, not only after death." That's an interesting statement, isn't it? He's not just talking about being with Jesus after he dies, but being with Jesus in his dying. In Paul's writings when he uses the phrase, "with Jesus" it refers to the believer's spiritual union with Christ.

When we look at these other usages, it speaks of the believer's participation with Christ in his suffering, crucifixion, burial, resurrection and glorification. You probably remember phrases like, "we died with Christ, we were raised with Christ" and other phrases like that. All of these phrases speak of the spiritual union we have with Christ, especially as it relates to Christ's redemptive work. Are you still with me?

Another clue to understanding what Paul means here is to look a couple chapters later in chapter 3. Paul writes,

<sup>10</sup> I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

When we look at his heartfelt confession here, when he says, "I want to know Christ", it makes sense. "I want to know the power of his resurrection." That too makes sense. "Participation in his sufferings." Yes, even that makes sense. And then he says, "Becoming like him in his death." What does that mean? Wait, now hold on a second. I'm not sure about this one....

Paul is telling us that there is a communion with Christ, a union with Christ, that we experience when we die. There is a certain 'with Christ' that we experience when we die in the Lord. If we dwell on this a bit more, doesn't it make sense? When we were first saved, we experienced an indescribable sweet union with Jesus. Our sins were washed clean, the Holy Spirit came into us, and we experienced a spiritual union with Jesus. As we continue the spiritual journey in this life, does our union with Christ diminish in any way? No, it remains the same. We continue to be with Christ, in Christ. What about after we die. Are we with Christ? Yes, we are actually in the physical presence of Christ. Just as Jesus said to the criminal on the cross, "Today you will be with me in paradise." But what about at the moment of death? What about at the very moment when the breathing stops, and the heart stops pumping blood, when the sword falls. What happens then? Are we in union with Christ at that moment? Does Christ's presence with us cease for a split second? No, it doesn't.

The death of a Christian, especially of those who die for the faith, becomes an opportunity to witness the unbreakable spiritual union between Christ and the Christian. What is death for us, and need I remind you, that we will all die. My death, your death, is the final opportunity on this side to experience union with Christ. In dying well, it's the final opportunity to Christ to be glorified in us. You see, a person speaks like that when their ultimate goal is the exaltation of Christ. Paul's ultimate goal was not to get to heaven. It wasn't even to get as many Jews and Gentiles into heaven. His ultimate goal was to exalt and glorify his Lord and Saviour. So, if he lives, yes, fruitful Gospel labour which results in glory to Christ, and if he dies, that too will be his final act of bringing glory to Christ. May we too take such a view of our lives and live and die for his glory.

Remember that both living and dying falls under the ultimate goal of exalting Christ.

Let's pray.