

The Future
Philippians 1:18b-26

Let's talk about Heaven for a minute. What is Heaven going to be like? Who will be there? How do we get there? What will we do? Are you ready to go there? And, of course, we have to ask the question, will our dogs be there? There is a lot we don't know about Heaven but there is a lot we do know and we know enough right now to know we want to go there.

I know you have heard the old joke about the preacher who asked for everybody to raise their hand if they wanted to go to Heaven. A little boy in the back didn't raise his hand and the preacher asked why not. The little boy said, "*Well, I thought you were getting up a group to go right now.*"

Well, my question to you today is, "*Why not?*" Why not right now? No. Don't worry. I'm not going to break out the Jim Jones juice in communion cups so we can all commit suicide. I'm just asking the question. If I had a heavenly bus, a godly Greyhound, a divine double-decker waiting right outside the door ready to haul you to Heaven right now, would you get on? Why or why not? And I honestly understand if you answer yes or no.

I say that because I completely understand wanting to be in Heaven right now and away from this nasty old world but maybe there is something in this world that I am supposed to do. So, that can be a difficult question to answer. In fact, the Apostle Paul didn't know how to answer that question either as we will see in **Philippians 1:18-26**.

We are continuing our sermon series on what we struggle with and for some people that includes a struggle with the future. A couple of weeks ago we talked about what to do if you struggle with worry. And for those who struggle with what lies ahead in the future, that may be part of it. Worry about the future is very common but I wanted to separate this out from just common worry because there are some specific things that will affect us all in the future and we need to know how to have the right perspective on the things that may or may not happen to us. I would say that Paul struggled with the future but honestly, that's not necessarily a bad thing.

Let's read it in **Philippians 1**. Let's start with the last part of **verse 18** and read through **verse 26**. Paul says, "*Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, 19for 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. 20I 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. 21For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; 24but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. 25Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, 26so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.”

Previous to this, Paul has told of some difficult things that have happened to him but he says at the end of **verse 18** that he still rejoices. He says in **2 Corinthians 11** that he was whipped, stoned, left for dead, shipwrecked, stabbed, shot and run over by a steam roller (well, not exactly but he might as well have) and yet here he is rejoicing. I’m reminded of the old Alabama song, You Can’t Keep a Good Man Down. That describes Paul, doesn’t it?

I looked up the words to that song and here is what it says. He starts off talking about how his woman has left him and he was really bummed out at first but you can’t keep a good man down. He says, *“Oh, enough is enough I won't take anymore
I'm pickin' myself up off the floor*

*Gonna dress up in the finest clothes that I own
And take it to the streets, I won't be lonely for long
I'm gonna put all my best moves
On every single woman I see
You can't keep a good man down.”*

Now, I like Alabama but what is this man’s hope in? It sounds like his hope is in his wardrobe and his good looks and in his charm. I hope that works out for him. Well, some of us here don’t have that stuff to rely on and that is okay because that is not where our joy comes from. I guess, like Paul, we will just have to rely on obedience to God to find our joy. When you have a relationship with God and your focus is on Him and pleasing Him and being obedient to Him, then you can’t keep a good man or woman down. We will have joy.

When I say that, some of you may be thinking, *“Yea, but Todd, you don't know what I am going through. The doctor gave me a bad diagnosis.”* Or you are thinking, *“Todd, I can't have joy. My body is falling apart.”* Or *“My marriage is falling apart.”* Or *“My mind is falling*

apart.” And I hear ya. Those are horrible, bad things. But we can still have joy in the midst of those things. That’s what sets us apart from unbelievers.

You have joy when you see this life as a net win. Whatever happens, we win. As true believers, whatever happens to us is in God’s hands and God is in control and He loves us so what is there not to have joy about? Paul earlier told the Romans that in all things God works for the good of those who love him. (Romans 8:28) If you believe that, and you should, then what in the world are you worried about?

Now, sometimes we make bad decisions and wind up in trouble. You’ve heard the funny saying, *“Well, well, well, if it isn’t the consequences of my own actions!”* We are surprised sometimes that our actions have consequences and we shouldn’t be. But that is part of what Paul is saying in **verse 20** where he says, *“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..”*

It is a choice to exalt Jesus Christ and we do that by acting more and more like Him. And how do we act more like Him? We act more like Him by learning more about Him and seeking to know Him better. **Matthew 6:33** says, *“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”* **“All these things”** means joy and peace and love and the ability to go through this life overcoming all the things that might keep a man down.

Alright, I’m going to say something controversial right here. Start your tape recorders. Get ready to tweet or twit or post or whatever you do. You ready? Here goes. *“That God...He’s pretty smart.”* That’s it. That’s the tweet and I stand by it. He is. But hear me out.

God’s way is perfect. His way of living is perfect. His way of dying is perfect. His way of -----fill in the blank is perfect. Want peace? Get closer to God. Want joy? Get closer to God. Want a better marriage? Closer to God. Wondering what to do next? Closer to God. Afraid to die? Get closer to God. Afraid to live? Closer to Him. Afraid of spiders or snakes, democrats, get closer to God. Even if you are afraid of the consequences of your own actions. Get closer to God and just watch Him give you everything you need. It’s the stinking secret to all of life!

Paul is writing from jail, punished for preaching the Gospel. It’s not right. It’s not fair. His rights have been taken away. His life, liberty and pursuit of happiness have been taken

away. If anybody had the right to cry, cuss and complain, it was this man. If anybody had reason to want to get out of this life and go to Heaven, it was him. But look at what he says.

21For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23I am torn between the two.

What does it mean “*to live is Christ?*” We know what it means to die and go to Heaven, that is gain but what does it look like for your life to be about Christ? Paul tells us what it means in **verse 22**. He says it will mean fruitful labor. Now, for some of you, when I say “fruitful labor” your mind goes to one of a few places, most of which don’t sound very fun. Fruitful labor to you might sound like a lot of work. It sounds like digging a ditch or planting a tree, which can be hard to do and tiring.

It may sound like something very lofty and “spiritual”, things that only us highly paid and highly trained professional ministers can do. 😊 And fruitful labor may include some of those kinds of things but it also includes things like **being a mother**. I can’t do that. I can’t imagine how hard it is to be a mother these days but that is exactly what fruitful labor might look like. Henry James said, “*The best use for your life is to invest it in something that will outlast it.*” A mother or father or grandparent is in perfect position to invest in fruitful labor in their child.

Paul says if he goes on living it will mean fruitful labor. That’s what he does. That’s who he is. That’s why he is living. And it should be our reason to live as well. It means we are hearing from God about what He wants, then we are obedient to Him. And that obedience is what gives us joy and peace on the inside but outside it shows up as fruitful labor.

Fruitful labor may also show up in your giving. And I hear ya. “*Oh, there he goes again, Ethyl, talking about money! That’s all he cares about.*” Whatever. You know better. Do you think our church is involved with any fruitful labor? Then be a part of it by giving. If you don’t think so, then give to the church down the street that you think is doing fruitful labor. I don’t care. I just want your life to look like Paul’s as he lived for Christ.

Most of you know that our church has been called to minister specifically to the poor, the addicted and the incarcerated. That’s a pretty fruitful area. It can be hard though. We are not set up to provide the poor with money or the addicted with professional counseling. We have no sway with the judges or the courts to be able to get somebody out of jail.

We do have a food pantry that is available and stocked up with all kinds of good stuff. We don't promote it and sometimes it might go a week or two with nobody taking advantage of it. But every time it gets used by either a church member or non-church member, it is showing the love of Jesus in a way that is fruitful labor. Maybe you would like to donate a few cans or some meat or bread that can be frozen. That's fruitful labor right there.

Something else we do is send a copy of my sermons to every person on the jail ministry list every week. Right now, there are 35 people on that list. I always tell them that this will not be the greatest thing you have ever read but it is truth and the Gospel is in there and if nothing else, it's something to read. Think that's fruitful? Between that and visiting in the jails when we can, this has grown from one person several years ago to all these names on this list and every name is a person, a person that is probably struggling in a way you might not can imagine.

Now, more people read this message than hear it in person and you can be part of this fruitful labor if you want. The first and best thing you can do is write to one of these men or women and just give them a little note of encouragement. It doesn't have to be long. Just a note saying you are praying for them and maybe your favorite verse or whatever God leads you to say. Use the church address if you are worried about something but please do that. It will make all the difference for somebody and will be exactly what Paul was talking about when he said, "fruitful labor."

Another thing you can do if you want to be part of this ministry is just donate some stamps or envelopes. We go through a lot of that with 35 people every week as you can imagine. Do me a favor and donate the stamps or envelopes and not the money towards it. Make it a fruitful labor for yourself and be rewarded accordingly.

Other fruitful labor our church does is to video and record these services. We stream them to Facebook and our website and to You Tube. And every week we get between 150-400 people who watch us online. Almost every week I have some random person say, "*Hey, I watch the Christ Fellowship services online.*" That's fruitful labor.

Or maybe you want to give a shoebox or two to Operation Christmas Child that is coming right up. That is very fruitful labor right there. And it's fun!

One other way you can be involved in fruitful labor is to spread the Good News of Jesus. That may be the ultimate way and the most important way to produce fruitful labor. Don't

answer out loud but just think to yourself, when was the last time you said the name of Jesus outside the walls of this building?

Here's a crazy idea. With the political climate like it is right now, you have a choice when you go on social media. You can prove what an idiot somebody is for believing how they do with charts and graphs and quotes. You can prove that they are a hypocrite and a brain-dead moron by just citing some stats you got off Google.

Or...you could give your personal testimony on Facebook or Twitter or whatever you use. How about telling how God has healed you physically, mentally or spiritually? How about posting that you are praying for the democrats and the republicans to have a life-changing relationship with God through His Son Jesus, if they haven't already?

How about telling the world what it means to you to have that relationship? There are a million things wrong with social media these days but instead of adding to the long list of things that don't bring peace, how about doing some fruitful labor like Paul talks about here?

Paul, who was in prison for preaching the Gospel when he wrote this and had been beaten and stoned and blown up by bombs and all that other stuff, would say, "*Hmm, that sounds pretty easy to me!*" And it is literally the secret to life AND the secret to death. Just get closer to God. Spend more time seeking Him and His righteousness and less time worrying and complaining and just watch as God gives you peace and joy (calm delight) in this life and as you come to the end of your life.

I used to read a blog a few years ago written by a guy who was a nurse. He had been in the military for years, got out and went into nursing and I read it just because he could tell a good story. As far as I know, he wasn't a Christian. He never wrote anything about it but he once wrote about how he knew people had real faith or not. From combat in the military to seeing people in the ICU, he had seen a lot of death and he said he could always tell how a person really believed by how they died and how their family handled it when they died.

He said it was easy to tell because the ones without faith (that's how he put it) resisted and fought it and struggled and screamed and cried and so did their families. But he said the ones with faith were usually calm and peaceful as were their families.

There will always be grief when a loved one dies. That's natural and there is nothing wrong with that. We miss them when they are gone but for a believer, we know we will see them

again soon and we ought to be even a little bit jealous because they are now enjoying all the treasures of Heaven.

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But until then, we can have peace and joy in this life and help others to have it as well. That sounds like a pretty good deal to me. How about you? Do you know for sure that when you die, you will go to Heaven? It has nothing to do with how good you are although as a Christian, you should be known for your fruitful labor. It doesn't have anything to do with your parents or your country. Just because you were raised in a Christian country and a Christian home doesn't make you a Christian.

The only thing that makes any difference is if you have truly trusted in Jesus to be your Savior and allowed Him to change your life. He is the only way to Heaven. Ask Him for forgiveness today and repent of your sins and rejoice in this life just like Paul did. Do it right now as we pray.