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## PHILIPPIANS 1:20-26

Series: Choosing Joy in a Post-Traumatic World

Well today we come to verse 20 in Philippians, verses 20-26 in our passage today. As we do, we're going to see Paul's secret ingredient. The main thing that helps Paul be emotionally, spiritually, and mentally healthy. If you're looking for those things in your life, the solution really is found here in the Bible. God gives us this revelation through Paul's openness and his open understanding.

It starts with this key element right in this first verse in verse 20. I'm picking it up in the middle of the sentence, that's the three dots at the beginning. This is from the ESV version. If you have your little notebook that we write in the workbook, then you can take notes there and circle some of the words that I've circled and draw lines as I'm going to show you that I've done here. If you don't have one of those booklets, they're back at the table. They're free and you can take one and use it for your ongoing Bible study, just writing in your spiritual journal.

He says in verse 20 – *...but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body*, You see that's the secret ingredient. That Christ will be honored. The word *honored* means to magnify or to make big.

Now if you [garbled], this heart is this room, we'll imagine. And inside the heart, you've got this place over here with all the desires. The desires of your heart, the Bible talks about. So we know desires exist in the heart. That's where your longings are, your hopes are, your dreams. That's where desires turn bad and they become temptations. This is where our expectations develop. That's all in this corner of the room. It's a pretty active corner within our lives, because a lot of desires going on. And then over here, on this other side, we have this sense of emotion, of anger and sadness and anxiety (three negative emotions), but also joy and peace and love, those things that God wants us to have. Those we can see in this other corner of the heart. Then we've got the corner with the beliefs in it. We have strange beliefs sometimes that cause us to affect our behavior in particular ways.

But in the midst of all these things that exist in the heart, in the center there is this master space. This space with the chair. It's the where the mothership is controlled. See the heart is this central unit that guards the whole body. So it's this mothership and there's a chair in the middle there. That chair is very important, what's in it or who's sitting in it. When you become a Christian, you invite Christ into your life, and He is on the chair. But the problem is that these other things are competing inside the room for the chair. Our desires will push Christ off and put Him over here a little bit, and the desires take over. So our desires become temptations and then we end up doing

the wrong thing if we're not careful. Or emotions, an emotion of anger gets on the chair and prompts us to do the wrong thing.

So Paul is saying, let me tell you the secret here, because this is what I want in my life and what you need in your life. He says it is my goal that Christ be honored or magnified. That He's not this little thing in our lives, which can be the case with us as Christians, that we relegate Christ to this small place in our lives. But He's actually magnified. He's honored. He's made into something big and He's sitting on the chair of our lives. Because then when He's the master controller, He's also the professional organizer, who organizes our life, gets all these desires and emotions all in place. Because we're honoring Christ.

We can say that the greatest tool for emotional, spiritual, and mental health is to honor Christ in our hearts. In that place in our hearts where we're making all these decisions, where our mind is going crazy sometimes. When we honor Christ, He organizes all of that. We have now a fixed goal. We know where we're going. We're honoring Christ. I think that's really the sermon for today. But Paul is going to explain it a lot more for us so we can understand it. Paul is going to do this in two ways. He's going to do this either *by life or by death*. Let's just go and I've diagrammed the verses for you so that you can see them.

So do you see where it says life and I've kind of shown you all the different parts in the passage where he's talking about life. It's either the life or death. So this is the life part. I'm going to talk to you about all of these different pieces. But there's really two pieces. There's life or death. He says I'm either going to live or I'm going to die. Now for him that's a very real possibility, both of those, because right now he is in prison in Rome. He's about to face the trial and go before the courts there and they're going to determine whether he's guilty or not guilty. If they determine he's guilty, he's going to be killed right there. And if he's not guilty, he's going to be released. So for him this life and death is a very real thing.

I think in our lives, we all are going to experience death at some point. But can we make that statement that life or death, whatever it is, as we look toward the future, we have this choice. We have these two things out there. Paul is saying here we have life. We'll come back to those things in a moment. But also he says we have death.

Now it's red, so it might be a little harder for you to see those on the screen. But this is the death. And so these are the things. I've kind of drawn lines and indicated in the passage where he's going to amplify the idea of life or death. He's saying those two things exist. So if we put them together, we have this wrestling in his heart that we're going to see in just a moment. Because he says I want God to be magnified, Christ to be magnified in my life to be made big, whether I die or whether I live. That's what I want.

But notice the wrestling that takes place. I'm going to take you to the middle verse in verse 22. It says – *Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two*. In other words, I really don't know which one I'm going to choose. Both of them are good opportunities for me.

I think this is one of the keys to emotional health, is that as we look at the future we recognize there are other options out there and we come to the conclusion that if this happens, I can be

excited about that, and if this happens, I can be excited about that. So we move into this emotional neutrality, if I could say. When I say neutrality, I don't mean that we don't have emotion, because I think our emotions are significant and important, but our emotions are equally present. So if this happens, I'm okay. And if this happens, I'm okay. If we can move ourselves into that place as Paul is doing, well, then you're not going to be disappointed. Because either way you win. That's what he's saying here. Either way, I'm going to win. He says – *Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.*

I've underlined the two words *desire* and *necessary* because those are different motivations inside of a person's heart. Remember the room here. Different things are motivating us to take actions and guide the ship, so to speak. One is a desire and one is a need, necessary, an obligation. Those are two different things. We wrestle with those in our hearts. We have desires and we have needs.

You know, if I want to watch football, that's a desire, but I need to rake the leaves. Okay, that's the desire and the need. It's this wrestling that goes on inside of our hearts. What Paul is saying here is that I've got a desire and I've got a need and I'm okay with either one. I can I have an opportunity there.

I play golf with Frank. Frank and I go out and play golf. I don't know if we're going to play golf this week, maybe we are. But sometimes Frank and I are very busy guys. Okay. So we try to get our schedules together. But sometimes it doesn't work. I have a desire to play golf with Frank this week. But I also have this to-do list of all these things that need to get done. Either way, I win. Either I'm going to play golf with Frank or I'm going to get a bunch of stuff done. Okay, that's desire versus need. Are you seeing that idea here? There's not this sense of disappointment in Paul's life, because he's got this neutrality, emotional neutrality, and he understands these things, these desires and needs.

We work on children, we help young people understand this idea. Because young person, you're in your life, you're trying to wrestle with what we call responsibility. Responsibility is when obligation or need weighs out over desire. I want to play on my iPad, but my mom has just asked me to take out the trash. So what do “I want to” do something versus “I need to.” “The essence of responsibility is when “I need to” wins over “I want to.” It helps us stay on a diet, it helps us stay on a budget. This is responsibility. It's a very important part of our heart.

I would just suggest that as we wrestle in our hearts with these kinds of things, good things happen. There are many times when the “I need to” needs to win over the “I want to.” Sometimes a parent will say to me, “I just wish my kids would want to do what's right.” And I say to them, “You know, I don't even think that's reasonable. I don't even want to do what's right sometimes. I don't think it's wanting to do what's right that's maturity; I think it's doing the right thing even if I don't want to. That's the sign of maturity.” It's “I need to” over “I want to.”

Well, Paul's wrestling with desires and with necessity inside of his heart. He's wrestling with those things and he says, well, they're both equal in my life. I would like to go into both of these areas of Paul's life and see what he's talking about when he talks about these two things.

So let's look at the first one where he says there – *My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is better.* He's thinking about heaven. He's thinking about going to be with Jesus. I'm going to be with Jesus. This is this sense of heaven that he's longing for. He's looking forward to that. That's his desire. I mean here's a guy who's been beaten up, he's been in shipwrecks, he's been in prison, all kinds of bad things. My body's about had it, he says. I am ready for heaven. That's what he's saying here. And I can hardly wait. Because then I'm going to see Christ.

Now I think if we were more heavenly minded, if we had more pondering of heaven, it would make our earthly life a little bit easier. If we recognize the glory that heaven is... We probably need a sermon on heaven every month. Maybe some of us need a sermon on heaven every week. I don't know. But the idea here is we need to keep our eyes on heaven and where we're going. It's just going to be a magnificent experience.

Marsha, age nine, was asked, “What is heaven like?” She says, “Oh heaven. There's no homework in heaven.” And then she gasped, “Unless my teacher's there.” Well I don't think that we're going to have homework in heaven. But I do think that there's this sense of what is heaven. Her friend says, “Well doctors try to keep you alive so you don't die, and they try to keep you alive long enough so you can pay all their bills.” Well I think it's true that you look at the bill sometimes and you think, “Well, I think I'd rather go to heaven.” But the point is, there's this picture of heaven that we all need in our lives.

I used to think of heaven in terms of the things that are there. The golden streets, and the pearly gates, and God is the light, and this big city that He's built with rivers of water, and all this. I used to think about heaven in those terms. Not anymore. Now when I think about heaven, I think about the people that are going to be there, that are there, and they've gone ahead before me and I'm going to see them. It's those people that I will just enjoy being with. That's what Jesus was saying to His disciples when He says – *I am going ahead to prepare a place for you. And when I do, I will come back and take you to be with me where I am.* That we're going to be together. This sense of togetherness that we experience. I'm going to look forward to seeing my dad, such a special guy in my life. And he's already there. I'll go there and I'll be able to see him and greet him and enjoy him.

Joanne and I were just this last week thinking about Ellen, our dear friend who worked for us for about ten years. Ellen was dying of cancer when she called me. We all knew this. We're wrestling with her and so on. And Ellen said to me on the phone, “I just can't talk to anybody else about this. Could I talk to you about death?”

I said, “Sure. Let's talk about it.”

She says, “What is dying like?”

I said, “Ellen, I really don't know. I don't know what it's like. I do know this. The Bible says when you're absent from the body, you're present with the Lord.”

She says, “You know, I'm not so concerned about me dying as much as I am the people I'm leaving behind. My husband and other people that I love and care for, I'm concerned for them.” I

think she's saying what Paul was saying that "I can depart and be with Christ, but there's something necessary here for me in life that also is important to me." That's what Paul is saying.

And so now, Paul, in these words, he says – *My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better*. The word *depart* there, that word is *analuō*, which means to... Well here's how it's used, which is very interesting. Because the way it's used describes this process of dying, I think. It's used of a soldier who is packing up his tent so he can depart and go to the next place. Of course we view ourselves. We're just in these tents and we're just packing up this tent, and we're going to the next place, which is heaven. That's an interesting picture that we're not fighting the battle anymore, at least not here, then we're going on. So that's one way that it's used.

Another way that it's used in the common Greek language of the day (not in the Bible, but in the common Greek language of the day) is used about a boat that's tied to the pier, and then they release the ropes so that the boat can go off. He's departing. The boat is departing. I just imagine that picture of our understanding of death and how we're departing to go to something better. What an interesting statement.

It's also used about a farmer who has a yoke on these oxen. He takes the yoke off the oxen so the oxen can depart. And I think, wow, you know, that's what's going to happen to us. The workload that we have will be taken off of us and we can depart and go to heaven. That's the pictures that are embedded in this word *depart* that I think are so meaningful.

We need to think about heaven. We need to recognize its value. We need to have our eyes on heaven and know that we're going to see Jesus there. It's a beautiful place. It's a beautiful thought. That's why Paul is saying that's where my desire is. Those desires... I just want to see Jesus again.

But let's go on. In this next part I want to talk about *remaining in the flesh*. You see in verse 22 it says – *If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me*. So there's two different ideas being talked about here. If I'm going to stay here in the body, well, this is what it looks like. One is fruitful labor for me.

The idea of fruit in the Bible has the idea either of the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, all of those things), things that we need. It's the building of that fruit that God often does. Why doesn't He just take us to heaven right away when we die? Because we have work to do. We have this fruitful labor that needs to take place. And sometimes that work is inside of our hearts. Sometimes we have those challenges inside of us that just need to be honed down.

Now those nine things mentioned in Galatians 5 we call the fruit of the Spirit actually come from the Spirit of God. They're not human things we just drum up so I can be more patient. They are things that come from God's Spirit at work in me. And so there's the fruit of God being on the throne in my heart room. And when He's on the throne, then these things start to grow inside of me so that I can be more self-controlled. I can be more kind. All of those words that are used there. God is at work in our lives.

I would just suggest that sometimes we need to ask the question, given the challenges I'm facing right now, God hasn't taken me home yet. He's got me here because maybe He's growing something inside of me. Maybe he's producing some fruit. Maybe there's some fruitful labor going on inside of my heart. But I suspect that Paul is also referring here, maybe primarily referring to the fruitful labor of his work. I mean he's a guy who was out planting churches, sharing the gospel with people. He was doing evangelism and he was doing discipleship. When he did those two things, then there was fruit as a result of that. More people were coming to Christ. More people were growing in their faith. And so he's looking at this fruitful labor. He says if I'm going to be here on earth, my life is going to be fruitful.

I was trying to decide what to call this sermon today and I ended up with this long title. I don't know if I could put this all on an image, Greg. I don't know if you can do it. Greg creates our images for our sermons that go on our blog. But this is where I'm at, Greg, at this point. Maybe I'll change this after I'm done teaching. But where I'm at now is here's the title: "Christian, You're Going to Heaven. Meanwhile, Make a Difference." I think that's what Paul is saying, Christian you're on your way to heaven; meanwhile, make a difference. That's the idea that Paul is saying. If I'm going to stay here in life, I'm not going to sit around. I'm going to do something for the Lord. There's going to be fruitful labor in my life.

Now he goes on down at the end of the passage there in verse 25. He says – *Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all...* Why? Why am I going to remain? For two things – *for your progress and joy in the faith.*

Now that word *joy* is used sixteen times in the book of Philippians, mainly referring to having joy yourself. Paul is saying I'm rejoicing. You should rejoice. But now he's saying something different here in these words. What he's saying is my job is to help you rejoice. Isn't that what you see him saying there? That my job isn't just to make me rejoice. My job is about helping you to rejoice and (what else?) to progress – *for your progress in your joy in the faith.* Hmm. That's why I say make a difference. You're on your way to heaven, yes. But meanwhile, you make a difference. Because what we want to do is we want to help other people experience joy.

I know that one of the solutions for depression, discouragement that we sometimes have is we say to people, go out and serve. Get to be with other people. Think about other people. Focus on helping other people experience joy. And what ends up happening is you start experiencing some joy in the process. That's the idea that he's saying here, I think.

In fact, I think this is another key to this emotional health idea. We're seeing three of them today. One is the supreme one, that Christ is going to be magnified in my life. That's going to help me with emotional health. Secondly, he's saying there's this kind of balance I have in my life that I desire this and I don't know which one to choose. I'm okay with either. There's this kind of emotional neutrality that helps us not be so easily up and down with our emotions, but we can allow the future not to dictate our emotional health. We're making these decisions now to see how God could be working either of those. And now another I think aspect of emotional health he says get out and help other people. Your progress and your joy in the faith are my priority. I'm going to be thinking about other people, not just thinking about myself.

Because here's what happens. When emotions start crawling up under the seat inside of the control room of our heart, then we tend to be more self-focused. It's about my rights. It's about my pain. It's about somebody who's hurt me. And that's why I'm angry. Or it's about my loss and my suffering. And that's why I'm sad. Or it's about my lack of control. And that's why I'm anxious. And so we start focusing on me. It's all about me. So we need to keep pushing the emotions off the off the seat, bringing Christ, magnifying Him, putting Him on the seat, so that we can be useful for Him. We can be out there sharing and doing ministry and doing what God wants us to do. That's what God would have for us.

Wow, this is just an amazing passage. That's why I had to diagram it in my own mind. So I could see what is he actually saying here. Because my goal is an in-depth study of the book of Philippians so we can draw out the truths that are there. I'm not sharing with you some ideas out of a psychology book and finding scriptures to attach to them. What I'm trying to do is look into God's word and draw the truths right out of God's word that can help us understand how we can live healthy lives.

I think that's what Paul is saying here. He's teaching us. He's opening the window to his heart and he says, "Okay, guys. I'll let you see inside of me. This is what's going on in my heart." That's partly why I love Philippians so much. I love the Psalms too because David does that in the Psalms. He says I'm going to just open my heart and let you see my emotional struggles I'm going through. We look at that and we go, "Wow, I need that." Because it's not good enough on a behavior level to just put a smile on my face. And okay, I'm going to put on this joy I have outside because we don't feel it. Okay, we don't feel joyful. In order to do that we have to put Christ on the center of the throne. We have to recognize that God is all and when we do have God running our life, then it changes things. There are things we have to believe.

That's why he says earlier in the passage – *I want you to know, brothers*. In other words, there's things you need to know in order to experience emotional health. Part of that is you just got to know God is at work. That's what he's saying. When we recognize that God is sovereign, that God is in control, that God is at work, we move Him to the center of that control center inside of our hearts that allows things to fall into place in a better way.

Why do we do all of this? Let's look how the passage ends in verse 26. *So that...* Notice the word *so that* because the words *so that* kind of are logically taking us through the passage. Notice in verse 25, it says – *convinced of this*. He's logically taking us through these ideas. So all the way through it we have these connecting words. But now we have this *so that*. In other words I'm going to live this life, either for dying or living. If I live, it's going to be *for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again*.

The *ample cause to glory* is a reference right back to the honor idea. Because the word *glory* is greatness revealed. That's what the word *glory* means. The glory of God is His greatness revealed. So when we worship the Lord and we draw attention to His glory, we are revealing his greatness. We're magnifying His greatness. What we're doing is we are magnifying who He is. We're putting him on that seat. We're making Him bigger in our heart than He was before. We all probably could benefit from that because we tend to make Christ smaller in our hearts than we

should. We need to amplify Him so He's bigger, He's magnified in our hearts, and then through us He's magnified to others. So other people can see, yes, that's what a Christian is? Wow. Yes, that's the person who's serving the Lord. Wow, isn't that interesting. I can see Christ in that person.

So he says – *You have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.* You know, I think that there are some people who believe that when God created us He put us on earth to entertain ourselves until we die. I think that idea about life is a misnomer. I just think that's not why we're here is just to entertain ourselves until we die. We are on a mission. We have a mission-oriented view of life. Paul is saying I'm on a mission. Either I'm taken to be taken to heaven (which is great, I'll meet Christ) or I'm going to fulfill my obligation. This is necessary for you, this need that I have, to continue to help you to grow in your faith, to help you progress.

I'm just really grateful to be part of a church that's eager to do that. Not only among us but in the community. We're eager to bless people. We're eager to share Christ with others. We want the gospel to progress in other people's lives, not just in ours. And we're eager to share that.

So I didn't do this yet, but I'm going to do it now. I'm going to read the whole passage to you. So you can get it all in context and all the pieces will stand out to you as I read it to you instead of reading at the beginning. I want to read it all to you now. Listen into this Philippians 1:20-26. *But that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.*

Christian, you're on your way to heaven. In the meantime, let's make a difference.

Would you stand with me and let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we're asking you to do that work in our hearts. Lord, we sometimes allow the emotions of our lives to take control and they take us on these wild rides that are not too effective, not too helpful, and even sometimes limit our future, as it did with Moses. Lord, we want to serve you. We want to put you on the center of our throne. It's hard sometimes because of the things that are going on right around us. Lord, would you help us understand what that looks like? I know we're not experiencing the difficulties that Paul experienced, whether he's going to die or not facing a trial. But Lord, we do have all those things that are going on in our lives now that swirl around us and make it difficult for us to focus, to magnify Christ. So Lord, I'm asking that you would do a work deep in our hearts. Show us what that means, Father. Give us this picture of heaven that we need so that we can just imagine what it's like being there. We know that if we do that, your glory will shine in our hearts as well. Lord, be honored in our lives. We ask this week in Jesus' name, (and all God's people said) amen.