

Life of Christ Overflowing

✠ **Magnify Christ in life or death.** (vv.18b-21)

✠ **Joyful progress in the faith...** (vv.21-26)

In the Name of **Christ** our **Life**, dearly redeemed:

Is Paul just strange? Or is something going on with him that is truly amazing? Have you ever told a friend you were looking forward to going home to heaven, but they reacted in horror? Years ago an old Jewish friend said, “Don’t talk like that!” To some folks this sounds so morbid: *“To die is gain”*?

It’s equally strange to hear Paul say, *“For me, to live is Christ.”* For one thing, what does it really mean to speak about the **Life of Christ**? Dig a little deeper into Paul’s circumstances, and you have to shake your head in amazement. Ever been in the hospital and wondered why you were called “a patient”? “I just wanna go home!” Ever cut your finger or suffer a minor injury and have to miss an important game or some family fun? “I just want to play...to work...to dance!” How could Paul sound so hopeful? Why so upbeat that he speaks about the **Life of Christ** as **Overflowing**?

✠ **Magnify Christ in life or death.** (vv.18b-21)

In this letter to his dear church members at Philippi, Paul is definitely sharing personal details. To get a taste for what his life was like follow the path of recent hurricanes. See extreme loss. Growing up as Saul of Tarsus, he rocked his world as an up and coming, highly trained, self-righteous Jewish rabbi. But Saul lost it all when he became Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ and missionary to the Gentile world. His fellow Jews so hated him that Paul had to play the Roman citizenship card to escape false imprisonment in Jerusalem and stand trial before the Emperor in Rome. Dicey move. Philippians is one of Paul’s four Captivity Letters written under house arrest, awaiting trial while chained to a Roman soldier. How can Paul be happy, at peace, and patient?

Paul was a doer. A “go-getter.” Do you ever read about Paul sleeping or taking a noon day rest like Peter or other Bible men? On one missionary journey everyone else got on the boat to sail, but Paul walked overland. Hiking up and down some rugged shoreline, praying, alone with the Lord, meeting up with them later. (Acts 20:13f) What could possibly possess Paul to give him patient peace from prison?

The answer is right here in our text. Note the determination and direction of his gaze: *“Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. 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. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”* (1:18–21 NIV84)

He’s making a sanctified choice not to wallow in self-pity. Paul never attended a pity party for himself or anyone else. He’s counting not only on their prayers, but on powerful answers to prayer, *“given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ.”* That’s not a lightning bolt from heaven. There is no secret light socket where you stick your finger for a zap of divine light. God keeps it simple: Word and sacrament then and now. These power up our worship **Life of Christ**. Paul is counting on his Lord Christ to turn his imperial plea for justice into genuine deliverance so he can continue on missions for Christ. No way *“ashamed,”* every way with *“sufficient courage,”* all because Paul minimizes his own problems and maximizes Christ. Here is the power for **Life...Overflowing**: *“...so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.”* Dying to self, but living for Christ; crucifying the passions of this sinful body to rise to new **Life in Christ**...each day **Magnify Christ in life or death**.

✦ Joyful progress in the faith... (vv.21-26)

Prisoners of war dare not lose hope. Remember Vietnam stories, GI's tapping out coded messages on jungle prison walls? Some composed a song they later sang back in the States – all to keep hope alive.

Then there was that sweet picture from the early days of the Internet. Preemie twins struggling for life, one especially sick and dying. Finally a nurse put them together in the same cradle. The picture showed the healthy twin with his little arm across his sister's tiny shoulder. She got well. Both lived.

That's how you need to picture Paul's intense desire to help his dear Philippians. They heard he was in prison. They would naturally feel down about it: Lydia, the business woman from Thyatira; her family and that of the jailer who had beaten Paul and Silas. He too miraculously became a believer in Jesus as his own Lord and Savior. (Acts 16) They needed Paul to ignore his own pain, to put an arm across their shoulder in his letter from so far away and extol **Joyful progress in the faith...**

Some of you listening, dearly want to leave this earth and go home to heaven. You've had a good life. Those whom you love most have passed from grace to glory. It's lonely here. You want to see them again, to rest in the arms of your loving Savior. That's not morbid. It's the sweet hope of heaven. But what do we do today?

Paul would wake each morning, still chained, trial looming. What's all this for? Simple answer: **progress in the faith.** Life on this earth is all about growing up by **faith** until we conquer suffering, sorrow and depression by everlasting joy. God works this miracle of **Joyful progress in the faith....**

That's why Paul speaks such joyful hope under house arrest. *“If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me.”* He must be conscious of a power beyond his own. Arms much longer than his. Hands much stronger without the arthritic pain in joints so long abused by extremely harsh travel, merciless beatings and deadly experience. Paul must be seeing with the eyes of faith some kind of love that cannot fail, faithfulness beyond his own fickle feelings, accomplishing unconditional, self-sacrificing victory. Not death, but resurrection hope looms as it did for ancient prophets like Zechariah. Through Zechariah the LORD calls: *“Return to your fortress, O prisoners of hope; even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you.”* (Zechariah 9:12 NIV84)

Paul admits he's torn. *“What shall I choose? I do not know!”* It's not a choice of which is better. That's very clear. *“I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.”* But now such all-conquering love has overwhelmed his soul with God's kindness, love and forgiveness. **Life is Overflowing** his heart with Christ's self-sacrificing love. *“It is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.”* Paul's life is not about Paul. Your life, my life – none of this is about me or you.

How can anyone think that way? By growing up in the Lord. Paul's maturing faith speaks here: *“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, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.”* The next verse reveals where this overflowing power of love is coming from. *“Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel.”*

See the bright Morning Star? Faith shines most brightly against the darkest night. Every whining complaint of mine – forgiven. Every family squabble – settled. Every filthy picture polluting your heart from TV or dragging Internet eyes into sinful passion – all cleansed, all clean. *“Your sin, not in part, but the whole, [has been] nailed to the cross, [you need] fear it no more; Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!”* (CWS 760 Spafford) That's the **Life of Christ Overflowing** – from grace to glory. Amen.