

Weekly Sermon Discussion Guide

September 15, 2024

A Bigger Story

The Choices Before Us

Philippians 1:12-26

KEY VERSES

¹²I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually resulted in the progress of the gospel, ¹³ so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard^[a] and to everyone else that my imprisonment is for Christ, ¹⁴ and most of the brothers and sisters, having been made confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, dare to speak the word^[b] with greater boldness and without fear. ¹⁵ Some proclaim Christ from envy and rivalry but others from goodwill. ¹⁶ These proclaim Christ out of love, knowing that I have been put here for the defense of the gospel; ¹⁷ the others proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but intending to increase my suffering in my imprisonment. ¹⁸ What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice, ¹⁹ for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my salvation. ²⁰ It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame in any way but that by my speaking with all boldness Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. ²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me, yet I cannot say which I will choose. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better, ²⁴ but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. ²⁵ Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, ²⁶ so that, by my presence again with you, your boast might abound in Christ Jesus because of me.

From prison and in his own way, Paul muddles over the timeless question, “to be or not to be.” This pleasure/pain calculus is not an uncommon way for us to think and navigate our world. Pleasure can take many forms and there are huge differences between Paul and Hamlet’s interpretation. As Paul writes this letter, there’s a hopelessness that pervades everything about his situation. In spite of his conditions, his version of “to be and not to be” is musing between what’s more pleasant for himself, to be with Christ, or his fruitful labor on earth. (v. 21-23). **Consider Pauls’ situation, and how he is able to have this perspective. What do these verses mean to you, that “living is Christ and dying is gain?”**

Consider these ways in which Paul frames a life worth living from prison. Though intimidating to compare ourselves to Paul, God equally calls us to be part of His bigger story:

1) Paul’s chooses to think of the good of his friends the Philippians over himself (v. 24-26).

Who are the people in your life with whom you have this same kind of loving, intimate relationship? The more we choose for the friends we have, the more God can involve us in His story.

2) Paul chooses to serve the Roman guards' future, giving them something better than guarding Roman prisoners to be their life story (v. 13-14). **We all have enemies and persecutors in our life. How can we love and pray for them?**

3) Paul chooses to serve the future of the world, rejoicing over the spread of the gospel whether through love or selfish ambition (v. 15-18), even though he can't currently be a part of it. Sometimes our life's purpose can result from the most tragic of situations. **How can we choose to unselfishly serve the future of the world, as [Kelci Stringer did after her husband, Korey's death](#)?**

As we walk through this week, we will be faced with many choices. May we consider intentionally the story that God is inviting us into, and how we are going to listen to His voice as we make those choices. Amen.