

GATEWAY CHURCH NORTHUMBERLAND

14.10.18

Live and Let Die – Joss Bray

We're carrying on our voyage through Paul's letter to the Philippians.

Remember how Paul had started with the most important thing - how they were in Christ at Philippi.

Paul has then talked about how much he loved them as dear friends – and we heard how this was a big change for someone who had previously hated Christians.

This showed how God changes people and can change anyone!

We saw that Paul wanted the best for them – to progress, to mature, and to be filled with the fruit of righteousness –

Because that's what happens when we are right with God – if we want our lives to have real meaning and lasting fruit – then we need to be right with God

And then we heard about how Paul was in chains but was relaxed in God, reliant on God and ready for God to act – contrary to the world's view and expectation.

That's for us too – something to remember as often as possible.

And last week we read about how some people preached about Christ for selfish reasons – either to stir up trouble for Paul – because presumably he would be blamed for it – or for selfish ambition – perhaps building up a following for themselves – for a position and status, and maybe financial rewards that may come from that.

But Paul didn't let that get to him – not at all – he knew what was happening – and did not shrink back from pointing it out.

But the important thing for him was what was actually preached – or rather who was preached about.

It was all about Jesus for Paul – ever since he had encountered him on the road to Damascus – Jesus was his focus.

He was not going to get side tracked by what others did – he wasn't naïve – but he wasn't going to respond in a way that diminished Christ.

I think that can be hard for us to do – we can see that sometimes people seem to be preaching and teaching from a different motive to what we think is right.

The challenge for us is to respond in a way which does not diminish Christ – that does not taint the gospel – which is after all very good news.

So – if we take Paul’s example – if Christ is preached properly – then great – but also look at the character and motivation of the preacher.

The mistake is to follow the man - or woman rather than be wise and follow Jesus.

That is the danger of “ministries” we see all around us that don’t seem to be coming from a church base with proper accountability and oversight.

They may be preaching Christ – which is great – but as Paul noted – motives may not be Godly – we need to be aware of this.

In any case, Paul did a lot of rejoicing when he was in chains – there are 8 “rejoices” in this short letter – we had one last week – and we carry on today:

Philippians 1:

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice,¹⁹ 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.^[Or vindication; or salvation] 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.²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.²² 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!²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far;²⁴ but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.²⁵ 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,²⁶ so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.

Here, Paul is again confident of the bigger picture.

He knows the Philippians are praying for him and the Spirit of God is with him – what else does he need?

And what does he expect will happen as a result of these prayers?

In verse 19 there is that Greek word “soteria” – which can be translated as salvation or deliverance or vindication.

Now we know that once we are saved – born again into God’s family for ever – we can’t be un-born again.

So, what does he mean – is he expecting to be saved out of chains, to be delivered from the situation he is in, or to be vindicated as not guilty of any wrongdoing.

This is an interesting point – we have already noted that because of his situation, the gospel - this very good news - had reached people it was very unlikely to reach, and Paul rejoiced in it.

We know that he wasn’t feeling sorry for himself and just wanting to be released.

So why did he write that?

I think it was because Paul had an eye on the eternal – he wasn’t concentrating on his earthly situation – he was looking at the bigger picture.

This is really important for us too.

He had got to the point that for him – “to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

This is quite something - his concern was that he wouldn’t be ashamed or lose courage whatever happened to him.

He was going to be saved from that, delivered from it and vindicated – he would be shown to be a real follower of Christ.

Indeed - he expected and hoped that he would be.

So, he was prepared to say that “Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death”

So, the problem he was left with was not – will I live or die?

It was this – will I live well or die well – full of courage and faith that will serve to exalt – i.e. raise up, lift up, glorify - the name of Jesus?

He was genuinely torn between what is better – to live or die.

Paul’s problem was – that he saw real benefit to both living and dying.

To live for him meant fruitfulness, it meant encouraging and building others up, it meant more exalting of Jesus through those he was with.

To die for him meant to be with Jesus – which definitely seemed to prefer as an option - very reasonably I would say - but he was prepared to sacrifice his personal preference for the sake of his friends.

What a point to get to! “To live is Christ and to die is gain.”

What does that mean for us?

It is about this - if we are in Christ – if we have been saved and he is our Lord – then we are saved from the fear of death – and indeed from actual eternal death.

Which is hell – separation from God for ever and punishment for sin that doesn’t end.

It’s not trendy or comfortable to talk about hell – but Jesus certainly did – so perhaps we shouldn’t sidestep the issue.

If we love our neighbour – we don’t want them to go to hell – we want them to be saved – we need more passion – more love to tell them about Jesus, about forgiveness, about salvation.

It’s nothing to be embarrassed about – it’s a matter of eternity!

But death has no hold on us as Christians – for us “to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

Have we got to that point?

Now just to be very clear – this is not about getting to the point where you don’t care whether you live or die, or even feeling you would be better off dead – or people around you would be better off if you were dead.

Those thoughts and feelings are the fruit of depression, of poor self-image, of hopelessness that we don’t see here.

If you are like this – please seek help asap.

So can we say with Paul that I will rejoice in either living or dying – either because God has more work for me to do here – or because I will be with Jesus forever, sooner?!

I want to get to that point.

It’s a position of freedom.

It’s where the enemy cannot touch us – although he will try.

When we get to that point where “to live is Christ and to die is gain” – then we are completely free of the things that stop us living as Jesus wants us to – and completely free of being afraid of death - because we have an eternal home with Jesus – a destiny that no one or nothing can separate us from.

We are then free indeed.

Paul in chains has a message of freedom – an example of being all out for God – and that is for us too.

So - What are we going to do about it?

If you don't know Jesus – you can – forgiveness, freedom and eternal life are available right here - right now.

Give your life to him – turn away from sin – get forgiven – start again with Jesus as your Lord.

And if you do know Him – lets, follow Paul's example and be so focussed on God that we can also say:

“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”

We know we can't do it on our own. Paul knew that too.

That's why he valued the prayers of his friends and why he relied on the Spirit of God to help him.

Let's pray now – that the same Spirit - the Holy Spirit – will fill us and empower us for this.

Let's pray that we won't lose courage, that we won't be ashamed – that we will exalt the name of Jesus – in every circumstance – hard though that may be.

Remember that what God said to Joshua (C1 v5), he says to us now-

⁵ No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.