

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: Win Win

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Scripture:

Philippians 1:18-24

¹⁸ But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

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. 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 labor 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.

Transcript:

I am just back from two weeks in Congo and Rwanda, and a lot has happened in those two weeks. So before I preach, let me just do a couple of brief updates. First, I was in Congo when the Roe v. Wade decision was announced. And some of you think that was the right decision and others of you think that that was the wrong decision. As a church, there are all kinds of opinions in this church. And in many ways, that's the sign of a healthy church, that you don't have a bunch of group think going on. And there's the variety of opinions in our congregation on this. And there's a lot I could say, it would take hours to say it so I'm just going to be very brief just for today. How do we approach this as a community?

What I would urge is that we do not approach this in a partisan political sort of spirit, but instead through our relationship with Jesus in light of his unique kingdom perspective. One of the

things that just is amazing about Jesus is when he was presented with these kinds of issues, sort of A or B, in the Bible, he always had a third way that was not one side or the other, nor was it some kind of mushy compromise in the middle. It was just something completely different. And so as a church, I would urge us to try to approach this, seeking him, seeking his guidance through prayer and scripture, because I know his answers would be different than mine or yours or what we're hearing in the media. And I think search this out... These are complicated issues involving the sanctity of life, as well as real world, very difficult situations that women find themselves in.

I think Jesus approach is going to be a lot more complex, nuanced, and less simplistic than what we hear in our culture. So encourage us to try to approach it that way and look to Jesus for his answers, his kind of different perspective, third way perspective. There's a million things I could say about this and I might say some of those things in future sermons about how do we navigate something like this, but just for today, for us as a community, let's approach this not in a partisan political spirit, but through the lens of Jesus and seeking his kingdom perspective on this.

A second update is the trip itself. I was able to meet with our ministry partners in Congo and Rwanda. As you know, there's a lot of ongoing ethnic violence in Congo. The situation there is very unstable, but we were able to meet with some of our ministry partners. We were able to meet with the children, who quite frankly are not starving to death because of the ministries of this church and the nutrition program that we're supporting. And we were able to open a reconciliation center. All of those things have been funded by your generosity. And what we saw in Congo were some really grateful people for this church. We received a very warm welcome, and there's a lot of people that are very, very grateful for the ministries of this church and for you, for your generosity.

It's the same in Rwanda. I met with our partners there, and over the years through Center for Champions we have helped over 1000 street kids get off the streets, get out of poverty and get into jobs. And we are supporting other things in Rwanda as well. So in both Congo and Rwanda, a lot of gratitude for your generosity. Jesus is working there and he is making a difference. So thank you for what you're giving. Thank you. The other service did not applaud that and I thought they should have so good job. You are just a little closer to Jesus.

The scripture, we're continuing our ongoing... That was not in the notes by the way just in case you're wondering. Our sermon series on Philippians that's today's text from chapter one. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this, I rejoice. Yes. And I will continue to rejoice, 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. 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. If I am to go on living in the body this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I don't know. I'm torn

between the two. I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far, but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.

One time when my kids were little, they were toddlers, they were playing together. They got into a fight because my son wanted to play trains and my daughter wanted to play princesses. And so they got into this big fight, but then a miracle occurred. They actually worked it out between them. No parental threats required. They just kind of figured it out. And they decided to play princesses on a train. I have no idea what that is and I can't imagine how that would be fun, but somehow they had figured out what we call a win-win scenario where everybody wins. And in the text I just read the Apostle Paul makes what he considers to be the ultimate win-win statement. For me to live is Christ and to die is gain. It's a very inspiring sentence.

Christians quote it a lot, but if you think about it doesn't make a lot of sense since one of the options is death. And we don't usually think of the choice between life and death as a win-win scenario. That's usually like a win-lose scenario. But even the live part doesn't make sense because the Apostle Paul is writing this from prison. And yet his perspective is, you know what? If I live I get to keep telling people in jail about Jesus. If I die then I get to be with Jesus face to face. Either way, Paul says it's a win for me. Which means that he is invincible. Like nothing scares him. Nothing depresses him. Nothing worries him. Not even prison, not even death. No matter what his circumstances he's saying, it's a win. I don't know about you, but I do not go through my life saying no matter what my circumstances are, I'm happy. Just ask my wife. I don't do that. She's here. You can ask her. I don't do that.

How do we get this way where nothing scares us, nothing worries us, nothing discourages us? It gets to your definition of what it means to live. Not just be alive, but really live. Like what makes you say the sentence, man, this is living. You're like, maybe you're on the beach in Hawaii and you're like, man, this is living. What makes you say that? Because the secret to having invincible courage, hope and joy in any circumstance comes down to how we complete this sentence, to live is blank.

For Paul it's to live as Christ. How do you complete that sentence? Not your church answer, your real answer. Like by how you spend your time, your money, what you worry about, what you obsess over. By those things how do you complete the sentence to live is... For someone it might be to live is to be happy and just enjoy life. For others it might be to live is to be well liked and respected. For me often, I would say if I'm honest, sometimes for me to live is my job, because as hard as it is I also get a lot of satisfaction out of it.

Now all of those are really good things. They're not bad things. They're really, really good things, but they can't create a win-win scenario because those things can be taken away. And then what? If we lose them then where are we? And some of you maybe can't even complete the sentence to live is blank. Maybe there's a sense of apathy in your life. You don't actually know what you're living for. You're just going through the motions day after day. Well, it's another

day. There's nothing you're passionate about, nothing that's driving you. Jesus gives us an ability to complete that sentence, to live is with something that is big enough to live for, big enough to get you out of bed every morning, but also that can never be taken away so it's guaranteed.

You know, sometimes you'll hear in songs or a line in a movie, a character is going through something and they'll say something noble sounding like, "Well at least I have my family and they can't take that away from me." You know, it's like that Whitney Houston song, and I know some of you're probably too young to know who Whitney Houston is and that's a tragedy. So you should go home and Google her. Good singer, she was a great singer, right? And she had this song. It was a little bit cheesy. It was actually a lot cheesy and it was kind of over the top. In the song she sings, I decided long ago, never to walk in anyone's shadow. If I fail, if I succeed, at least I'll live what I believe. No matter what they take from me, they can't take away my dignity.

Well, yes they can. I just lost my dignity singing that song. Put you under enough pressure and you will grovel like a stray dog begging for food. Everything can be taken away. And as long as what we complete the sentence to live is blank. As long as what we put in that blank can be taken away it is a fragile flinder crutch that we are leaning on.

If our life is collapsing because our career is collapsing. That means our life is our career. If our life is collapsing because we people don't like us as much as we want that means being liked is our life. If our life is collapsing because our family is collapsing it means family is our life. To live as family. Again, those are all good things, but they can be taken away. And then what? Now, just before I go on, I'm not saying that when we lose something really important that we don't grieve. We have to grieve. Grieving is important, grieving matters. And we need people with us to grieve with us when we lose something that means something to us. And we need to grieve with Jesus because he's our hope.

But if we have this sense that I can't go on, my life has no meaning anymore. My life has no purpose. I don't see a future. If that's where we end up well then it means whatever we lost was what we were living for, what we were depending on. So what is that for you? Because as Pastor Michael Keller says, what we live for tends to kill us. What's killing us is our need for approval. And it's making us stressed out about what everyone else thinks about us. What's killing us is our need to succeed and now we're working too hard and we're killing ourselves doing that. Whatever you put more time, energy, money, worry, thought into than Jesus that is your functional God. Politics, education, physical appearance, being liked. That's your functional God. And if it's anything other than Jesus, it will not bring invincible hope.

So in this text, the Apostle Paul points to a different way, a different way of living that brings invincible courage, hope and joy. Philippians is the happiest book in the Bible. It's all about joy. It uses that word over and over and over again. And yet, as I said, the Apostle Paul is writing

this from prison. He's chained to a Roman guard 24 hours a day. He can't sleep by himself. He can't go to the bathroom by himself. So yes, his dignity has been taken away. Sorry, Whitney Houston. And he is also facing a possible death sentence for following Jesus. He's lost everything. And yet he says this, "I rejoice and I will continue to rejoice."

He's lost everything and he says I'm rejoicing twice in one verse. He has invincible joy because the center of his life is something that can never be taken away. He says, "To me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I'm to go on living in the body this will mean fruitful labor for me, yet what shall I choose? I don't know. I'm torn between the two. I desire to do the part and be with Christ, because that's better by far, but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body." He's saying, if I live I can keep telling people about Jesus in jail. If I die, I get to see Jesus face to face. I just can't decide. Life in prison or death. They're such good options, who could choose? How confusing. Because what he's living for, what he's looking to for courage, joy, and hope is Jesus.

The secret to invincibility is filling in the blank to live is filling it in with eternal things which comes down to Jesus and other people. We'll still encounter suffering. We'll still need to grieve losses, but we won't be without hope. Won't feel like I am nothing, I have nothing. Even facing death. So how do we do that? Because I'm not there yet. How do we do that? How do we get to the place where nothing phases us no matter what our circumstances are. How do we make Jesus and eternal things center? Well, the first thing is we need the power of the Holy Spirit. We have to ask the Holy Spirit to help us do this. This is not natural. It is supernatural and we need supernatural power. So ask the Holy Spirit, Lord help Jesus to be the most real central thing in my life.

We can't do this on our own. So ask the Holy Spirit. And then second deliberately prioritize eternity. And that can mean a number of things. So here are some sub-points. To prioritize eternity, calendar eternity, make sure it happens. So a couple of ways to do that. If we want Jesus to be more real to us, we will prioritize our money differently. We will give some of it away to God's eternal purposes because what we give to is what we are attached to. Where your treasure is there your heart will also be. So in Congo and Rwanda, I saw eternal things. I saw the ministries of this church making an eternal difference in people's lives. Getting them out of poverty, making sure they have enough food eat, but also doing that in the name of Jesus to help connect them to Jesus. Because even though we die, people live forever in heaven if we know Jesus.

So I saw eternal things happening. And because I've given to those things, as many of you have given to those things, I felt invested in those things. My heart was attached to those things, which means my heart is more attached to eternity. We'll prioritize money differently. If we really want Jesus to be more real to us than anything else we'll prioritize time differently. Spend time with Jesus in prayer and worship and scripture. We can't experience the presence of someone we never talk to or connect with. You know, sometimes people will say, "Well, I just feel so distant

from Jesus." And I'll be like, "Well, when was the last time you prayed?" And they're like, "I don't know, 2008, 2009. I mean, that's good, right?" We got to prioritize time with him, for him to be real.

Third, if we want to prioritize the eternal, that means we're going to prioritize relationships more than almost anything else because yes, people die, but if we know Jesus, we live forever in heaven together. Right before the verses I read, Paul says, "I want you to know brothers and sisters that what's happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel." See, he's concerned because his friends back in the church at Philippi, they're worried because he's in jail. And so what he's saying is don't worry about me. I'm good. Yeah, being in prison, not great, but hey, because I'm in prison, even some of Caesar's guards, even some of the emperor's guards are finding out about Jesus and becoming Christians. So don't worry Philippians. I'm good. Who's he focused on? Them, other people.

If I were in jail facing a death sentence I'd pretty much be focused on me, but he's focused on other people. And because of that, he has hope and courage and joy. Years ago, a friend of mine, Steve Richley, some of you know him, he was on staff here. He had a motorcycle accident that left him paralyzed from the neck down. That's about as bad as it gets, right? Well, when I went to visit him in the hospital I walked in, he's in on a full body cast. This terrible thing has just happened to him. I walk in, he sees me, he gets this big smile on his face and he said, "Scott, it is so good to see you sit down, man. How you doing? I got a bunch of questions for you. I want to catch up on your life. How's it going, Scott?" And I was like, oh Steve.

And he is like, "Okay, I guess that sounded a little weird given my circumstances." But for him it was genuine. In spite of this horrible thing, he still could feel genuine joy and courage and hope. Why? Because he was focused on something eternal. Relationship, in this case with me. And just PS, the good news of the story was through therapy he was eventually able to figure out how to walk again. But in that terrible moment, he still had genuine courage, hope and joy because he was focused on something eternal, namely relationships. If we want to have our hearts weaned from the temporary and attached to the eternal so that in any circumstance we have hope because we're attached to things that can never go away then we will prioritize relationships.

Then lastly to prioritize eternity would mean to partner with Jesus in healing the world. Healing injustice, helping hurting people, reaching out to someone in need, help people know Jesus. And there are as many ways to do that as there are people in this church. So ask the Holy Spirit to show you your gifts, where he might be calling you. Maybe it's to make your school or your workplace more just, maybe it's to help someone that you know, that is hurting. Maybe it's to come alongside one of our youth in Sunday School or our youth group to disciple the next generation of leaders in the church. Whatever it is for you be part of it because God's rescue mission is ongoing and eternal. And the results of that rescue mission are going to last forever. And we can be part of that. It can never be taken away. The way we participate in God's

rescue mission may change over time, but being part of his rescue mission can never be taken away no matter what.

Even if you're older and you can't get out anymore, you can still pray. You can still encourage people. You can still listen to people in pain. My dad would email all of his grandkids verses from the Bible. He called them promise verses. And he'd say, "This is what I'm praying for you. And this is what's great about you." Do you know what that does to a kid to have their grandparent do that? It's good stuff. It can never be taken away. The Apostle Paul, even though he's been thrown in jail, he's still part of God's rescue mission. And he says a few verses earlier, "Because I'm here even some of the palace guards are becoming Christians." And he's saying, "I am more a part of God's rescue mission. Not less. Not in spite of being in prison, but because of being in prison."

Paul's career was to help people know Jesus and start churches in cities all over the world. And his lifelong goal was to do that in Rome. So what's happened? He gets arrested and sent to Rome. Not the way he thought he was going to get to Rome, but it's still Rome. So boom, lifelong goal accomplished. And for 24 hours a day, different Roman guards working in shifts are chained to the most persuasive evangelist in history. And they start becoming Christians. God turned evil into pure gold. And when you trust that God will do that with any situation now you're invincible. And yes, we'll still suffer and yes, we'll still grieve, but we'll also ask the question, "How is God going to turn this into gold?" And that gives us hope. And what matters to you most is Jesus people and his rescue mission, you're invincible because those things will never be taken away.

I remember on one of our trips to Cambodia meeting a man named Kevin. This was several years ago, and Kevin used to make hundreds of thousands of dollars a year. But then he got addicted to alcohol and eventually heroin, and he ended up living on the streets in Vancouver, BC for several years. Until one night he felt an overwhelming sense of darkness. And so he prayed and felt the Holy Spirit kind of give him this supernatural sense of peace. And he got a picture in his mind of Jesus chasing the devil and the devil running away in fear.

And the next day he checked himself into recovery and got free of those addictions. And then he started going to church and then eventually he went on a short term mission trip to Cambodia and discovered that in Cambodia, if a slum is on some land that the government or a company wants, then the government will just send in bulldozers at two in the morning. The people there have no time to grab the few possessions that they actually own. And they'll bulldoze the houses, the little shacks, they're not houses. Bulldoze the little shacks down. Those people are then driven out into the middle of nowhere. Just dumped there, no compensation, nothing. Since their jobs were in the city they've lost those too.

Well, Kevin was visiting a slum when this happened and his heart just broke. And so he decided to stay in Cambodia and go with those villagers to the new location and help them rebuild their

village. And I remember asking him, I said, "As a westerner isn't it hard to live like this? No electricity, no water, no showers." And he said, "Oh no, it's easy. All those years I lived on the street, I'm used to this. What the devil meant for evil against me, God is using for good." And one of the things I noticed about Kevin is he smiled a lot. I would say, in fact, he smiled excessively. He was constantly smiling and he was constantly crying, only they were tears of joy. And he said this great thing. He said, "Before, all my tears were about me, but now my tears are because of what I see Jesus doing in my life and in the lives of these people."

And so Kevin now helps victims of injustice rebuild their villages in a new location and he advocates for them with the Cambodian government. Because as a westerner, he carries power they don't have and he uses it for good. He experiences the presence of Jesus, meaningful relationships with people he'll see in heaven for eternity. He's part of God's redemption of the world and Jesus is central to his life. He has something big enough to live for that can never be taken away. And because of that, he smiles excessively and has indestructible courage, hope, and joy. Because for him to live is Christ and Christ purposes and to die is gained because it only brings him closer to his savior.

And because of my job, I sometimes get to be with people as they die. And in my experience, there's a 100% track record of people like Kevin, who have lived for Jesus, other people and God's purposes, and when they come to die, there is joy on their face and peace in their heart and courage in their soul because their life is centered on eternity. And he is no fool who gives up that which he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.

So this week, how can you prioritize eternity to wean our hearts away from the temporary and latch onto our eternal God. To begin to let go of the things that do not last and grab onto the things that never age so that we can say truly from our hearts, "For me to live is Christ and to die is nothing but gain." So, Jesus help us be those people. We know that we need you in order to be these kinds of people. We cannot do this without you. So Lord Jesus ask your name, that you wean our hearts away from the temporary and help us grab onto those things that last forever, starting with you. We ask this in your name. Jesus. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- How do you complete the sentence to live is _____? What things make life worth living for you (honest answer, not "Bible Study" answer)?
- What might help you more authentically say "To live is Christ, to die is gain"?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.