

Reason We Live
The Reason We Live (Part 4)
Philippians 1:18b-26
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Well, this past week, hopefully all of you celebrated Valentine's Day. My guess is, most of you probably missed an important celebration the week before last, and that was the Feast of Saint Barsanuphius. Anyone celebrate the Feast of Saint Barsanuphius? I didn't think so. Commonly held on February 6 by the Greek Orthodox Church to venerate a man who died in 540 AD. He was an Egyptian, and the reason he's considered a saint by the Greek Orthodox Church is because he spent 50 years in absolute seclusion, living as a hermit in Gaza, in Israel. The reason he said he did this was "for the love of God." He conversed during those 50 years only through some letters which have been preserved and kept by the Orthodox Church. My thought when I contemplate that is that his kind of devotion to Jesus Christ is completely foreign to the devotion we see in the New Testament. Paul would have been appalled by such selfless devotion to God, because it runs completely contrary to the heart of this great man whose letter we've been studying. For Paul, living for God was people. It was all about people.

We've been examining a great paragraph in the first chapter of Philippians. A paragraph that begins in the middle of verse 18 and runs through verse 26. In that paragraph, Paul sets forth for us the Christian's reasons for living—those things that should dominate our thinking as believers in Jesus Christ. So far we've seen that our purpose for living should be, number one—to exalt Christ. We should live to lift Him up, to cause others to see Him in just a little more of His beauty and glory. Secondly, we discovered that we should live to be with Christ. Our desire should be to be with Christ. In this third and final section of the paragraph that we're going to look at this morning, Paul reveals his third great ambition for living, and it's simply this—to bring others to delight in Christ. To bring others to delight in Jesus Christ.

Let's look at verses 25 and 26. Paul writes "convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again." The theme of this third section of the paragraph we've been looking at is ministry to others. Ministry to others. Notice Paul says, "convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all." The word "this" refers back to verse 24. Paul is convinced that the Philippians need him. He's convinced that it's necessary for him to continue living for their sakes. And, convinced of this, Paul is fully expecting that he will remain and he will continue. The Greek word that's translated "will remain" refers to the fact that Paul will remain alive. It's used that way several times in the New Testament. Paul says, I'm convinced, I'm confident, that I will continue living—that I will

remain alive. The verb translated “to continue” means that he expects to stay with the Philippians. Not only will he remain alive, but he expects to stay united to this church that he’s come to love. What follows this expression of confidence ‘I know that I will remain alive, and I know that I’ll continue with you’—what follows that statement is a concise statement of Paul’s ministry goals. It describes his purpose for living in reference to others. Specifically, in this case, the Philippians. He is saying this. I will remain with you, in order to accomplish these basic core objectives. Specifically, Paul lays out his goals in ministry. We see two kinds of goals in these two verses. The first is what we could call the immediate goal of all ministry, and secondly, the ultimate goal of ministry.

First, Paul reveals the immediate goal of ministry. You see it there in verse 25. I know that I’ll continue—I’ll remain and continue for your progress and joy in the faith. There’s the immediate subordinate goal that he wants to accomplish. Progress and joy. Those two words summarize Paul’s concerns for the Philippians, and his concerns for us as well. Progress refers to the quality of our life in Christ. Joy refers to the quality of our experience of it. Paul wants us to grow both in maturity and in joy. By the way, you’ll notice that, in English; it’s also true in Greek, that both of these nouns share the same article. That means that both of them are further explained or modified by that phrase that follows—prepositional phrase, “in the faith.” In other words, here’s what Paul is saying. I’m concerned that you will make progress in the faith, and I’m concerned that you have joy in the faith.

Let’s look at his first concern. He’s concerned that the Philippians make progress in the faith. The Greek noun for “progress” occurs three times in the New Testament. It occurs here in this verse. It occurred in verse 12 of chapter 1, and it occurred—occurs in 1 Timothy 4:15. As we saw when we looked at verse 12, this noun is used in secular Greek to describe the work of men who went in advance of the army to blaze a trail so that the army could advance. It’s like our army Corp of Engineers. In verse 12, this word was used to refer to the advance or progress of the gospel, and here in verse 25, it refers to the progress or advance of every individual Philippian Christian in spiritual maturity. Paul wants them to advance in the faith, or with reference to the faith. Paul basically says, look, I want to be like an engineer. I want to go before you and I want to blaze a trail so that your faith can advance. So that your confidence in the truth of your faith can advance. Your understanding of the faith can make progress. In other words, Paul wants them to progress in their knowledge of the truth. Basically he’s saying, I want you to develop a deeper understanding of the doctrine, the truth of Scripture. This phrase “in the faith” is used a number of times in the New Testament to speak of the body of doctrine that we believe. There are so many references we could look at. Let me just turn you to one—I Timothy chapter 4. First Timothy 4:6, Paul writes to Timothy, “In pointing these things out to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus [watch this] constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following.” Paul says, listen, I want you to devote yourself to the content of the faith—to the doctrine that makes up what we

believe. And if you do that, your own soul, Timothy, will be nourished in that. Now why is this important? Why does Paul want them to grow in their appreciation for, their understanding of, and their practice of the truth that he had taught them? Why? Why is it important? Listen carefully. Because you cannot grow as a Christian without growing in your knowledge of the truth. You cannot grow as a Christian without growing in your knowledge of the truth. But let me give you a warning. Growing in knowledge is not the same thing as spiritual growth. Knowledge does not equal spiritual maturity. You can sit in a church like this and collect information and knowledge a long time and not grow spiritually. But, you will not become spiritually mature without knowledge. So knowledge is crucial, and Paul says, I want you to progress in your knowledge of the faith. I want you to make progress.

How can we know if the knowledge we're accumulating is doing its work in us, or whether it's simply turning to spiritual pride and complacency? There's a simple test of whether your knowledge is building spiritual maturity, or whether it's building spiritual pride and complacency, and it's this: Are you actively putting into practice whatever you're learning? There's the test. Are you doing what you're accumulating in knowledge? Are you more like Christ today than you were last month? Or last year? Can you, and others around you, see that knowledge changing how you think and how you act? For Paul, part of his reason for being was to cut a trail for every believer to follow, so that every believer he could influence could show steady progress in their grasp of the truth and in their practice of it. That's how genuine Christians think. You see, if you're in Christ, you cannot live as an island, just pursuing your own spiritual progress. You can't waltz in and out of the corporate worship each Lord's Day and ignore all those whom Paul says you are joined to in one body. You have to be concerned about others. If you're in Christ, you must get involved in the lives of others. This was the heart of Paul. This was his passion, was for the Philippians. For others to grow. For others to make progress.

But Paul has another immediate goal for his ministry. Not only for their progress in the faith, but he continues in verse 25, for their joy in the faith. We're still talking about that immediate goal he has in mind, and it's their joy. You see, for Paul, joy is an indispensable element of the Christian life. Philippians, like no other book in the New Testament makes this clear. And as we go along we'll study joy in more detail. But let me just give you a summary. Joy is a state of mind that can only flow from right theology. Joy flows from, springs from, a settled conviction that God is absolutely sovereign over my life and my circumstances. You want your own heart to be flooded with joy regardless of the circumstances that come? Then live in the confidence that God is in charge—that God is in control. That's how Paul could rejoice even in prison—even with the expectation, or the possibility of execution hanging over his head. He's filled with joy because he knows God's in charge.

Most of you have probably only heard in passing the name of Horatio Spafford. Horatio Spafford was a very successful Chicago attorney in the last part of the 1800s. He dearly loved his wife, his four daughters, and his son. He was a committed follower of Christ, and he was very active in his Presbyterian church. But he wasn't famous for any of those things. In his early forties, his successful life seemed to unravel. His son, his only son, died. A few months later, his large real estate investment was wiped out by the great Chicago fire of 1871. Shortly thereafter, Spafford arranged a trip for his family to Europe. He made it to coincide with the D.L. Moody crusade in England. At the last moment, a business delay came up and he sent his family on ahead with plans to join them shortly. But the ship had an accident. Another English vessel rammed it, and in just a matter of minutes, the ship sank. His wife was spared, but his four daughters died. In the span of a few months he had lost his only son, his four daughters, and most of his financial prosperity had been wiped away. As he sailed to Wales to be with his broken-hearted wife, he asked the captain to pause over the place where the ship had sunk and where his daughters had drowned. And that's the spot where he penned the words, "When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my lot, thou has taught me to say, it is well, it is well, with my soul." That is Biblical joy. One writer puts it this way: "For Paul, joy is more than a mood or an emotion. Joy is an understanding of existence that encompasses, on the one hand, both elation and on the other, depression. It can accept with created submission events which bring delight or dismay because joy allows one to see beyond any particular event to the sovereign Lord who stands above all events and ultimately has control over them." You can have joy regardless of your circumstances if you are confident that whatever your circumstances, God is in control and He means to use them for your good and for His glory. Paul says he makes it his ambition, and it should be ours, to see those around us increase in their knowledge of the content of the faith, and in their joy—their confidence in their God. Their confidence that He's in control regardless of the circumstances. So our purpose for living should include ministering to people—not becoming a hermit and retiring from everyone else. And the immediate goal of our ministry to those people is to be their progress in the faith, and their joy in the faith.

But as wonderful as those things are, they are not the best and the greatest goal. Secondly, Paul identifies for us in this passage, not simply the immediate goal of ministry but the ultimate goal of ministry. Notice verse 26, "I know that I'll remain and continue with you so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again." You notice that Paul introduces the phrase in verse 25 "your joy and progress in the faith" with the word "for" and he begins the next clause in verse 26 with the words "so that." Now listen carefully. When that construction that is in those English words occurs in the Greek text, it means that the first purpose is the immediate or subordinate purpose, and the second is the ultimate purpose. Let me illustrate this for you in another text. Turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 5. First Corinthians chapter 5 and verse 5. Paul, here, is dealing with an unrepentant sinner in the Corinthian congregation. He's dealing with the issue of church discipline and he says this in verse 5, "I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan"; there's what he's going to do. Now notice the word "for"; "for the

destruction of his flesh” and then the words “so that.” Same Greek construction and as it appears in the English in Philippians chapter 1. So what’s going on here? Paul is saying, I’m going to deliver such a one to Satan in the process of discipline, and my immediate or subordinate purpose is the destruction of his flesh, but my ultimate purpose is that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. So in Philippians chapter 1 verse 26, the clause that follows “so that” is Paul’s ultimate purpose for staying alive, and it’s his ultimate purpose for staying alongside the Philippians. Let me give you a literal translation of verse 26. This is how it reads in the Greek text, “So that your proud confidence may abound in Christ Jesus in me through my coming to you again.” Let me read that again. “So that your proud confidence may abound in Christ Jesus in me through my coming to you again.” What I want you to get, and it’s absolutely crucial, is that their proud confidence is not in Paul, as the New American Standard seems to indicate, but it’s in Christ. In fact, if you have the New ESV translation, which is a very good translation, they get it right here. The point is, their proud confidence is in Christ, but their proud confidence in Christ will abound through Paul’s coming to them again. Notice how this goal of Paul’s will be accomplished. He says you’re going to have a proud confidence in Christ, in me, through my coming to you again. You see, Paul had been to Philippi at least two times after he founded the church in Acts 16. It’s been 10 years ago now that he founded the church, and he’s been there at least twice, maybe three times. But now he hopes to come again. And he says, through my coming or when I come, your proud confidence in Jesus will abound in me.

You see, when Paul finally arrives—when he’s present with them—he plans through his teaching ministry to cause them to boast even more in Jesus Christ. That’s the third great ambition for which Paul lives. Not only to exalt Christ. Not only to be with Christ, but to bring others to delight in Christ. To bring others to boast in Jesus Christ.

But what does that mean? Well, that brings us to consider this ultimate goal of Paul’s in ministry. In order that your proud confidence may abound in Christ Jesus. The Greek word that’s translated “proud confidence” is literally the word “boast.” Of course, we don’t use that word favorably in English. It’s a pejorative term, and in fact it’s just never acceptable in English, “to boast.” But in Greek, it’s acceptability depends on the object of your boast—what it is that you’re boasting in. Paul loves this concept. In fact, in the New Testament, 60 times this idea of boasting, in either noun or verb form is found; 55 of those times, it’s Paul. He loves this idea. And he’s gaining this concept of boasting from the Old Testament. Particularly in the Septuagint, that is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, because this same word translated “boast” in Philippians 1 is often found in the Old Testament of boasting in the Lord. And it has in it the concept of trust. Let me illustrate this for you. Turn to Jeremiah chapter 9. Jeremiah chapter 9, verse 23. Familiar verses. Jeremiah says “Thus says the Lord, ‘Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I

am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,' declares the Lord." Now what's going on in that passage? In that context, you're not seeing bragging. You're not talking about someone who's conceited. Instead, what Jeremiah is showing us are the two components of this idea of boasting. Two components. The first is that you put your full confidence or trust in someone or something. You put your full reliance in someone or something. There, you have people putting their reliance or their confidence their wisdom, in their riches, or in the Lord. The second component you see in Jeremiah 9 is not only putting your full trust or confidence in someone or something, but secondly, then as a result, boasting or glorying in that something or someone. Now that you've put your entire confidence in that, then you boast of it. We see this in life don't we? A man whose boast, whose confidence, whose reliance is in his own wisdom finds a way to insert that in everyday conversation. He boasts in it. He glories in it. Someone whose confidence is in their wealth—they find a way to insert that in their daily life and in conversation, that that's where their glory—that's where their boast is. You see, you boast of what you rely on—of what you find confidence in. In the Biblical concept of boasting, a person is declaring what he relies on, what is his support in life. In other words, what his life is built on.

When we come to the New Testament, Paul basically sees two kinds of that boasting. Two basic categories of putting your reliance or confidence in someone or something. The first is boasting or reliance in yourself—in your own achievements, your own efforts. Turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 1. You see this kind of boasting highlighted there. First Corinthians chapter 1 verse 26. Paul says, "For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that he may nullify the things that are." Why? "so that no man may boast before the Lord." In other words, God has chosen the weak, the foolish, the base. That's us, folks. You don't come to this passage if you want to gain self-esteem. This is what God has chosen, and it's us. Why? Why did God choose us instead of the rich and the powerful and the noble and the great? So that no man may boast before God. Verse 30, "For by His doing, you are in Christ Jesus." Verse 31, "so that, just as it is written, let him who boasts, boast in the Lord." And he quotes Jeremiah 9 from the Septuagint. You see, if you're relying on yourself and your own achievements, then Paul says you have not been and you cannot be—until you let go of that—declared righteous before God. Can't happen. Notice Romans chapter 3. This kind of boasting in one's self and one's own achievements is antithetical to being in Christ. Romans chapter 3 verse 27. Paul has just finished laying out justification. He's just finished talking about all that is done for us when God declares a believing sinner righteous. Verse 27, "Where then is boasting? It is excluded." It is excluded. Chapter 4 verse 1, "What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works [there's boasting in himself, in his own achievements], he has something to boast about,

but not before God.” In other words, it’s impossible. Can’t be. Couldn’t happen that way. Because God’s plan calls for man to have no grounds for boasting in himself and his own achievements. In fact, Paul describes in Philippians 3:3 the Christian as one who puts no confidence in his flesh. Not only does he not boast in it, he puts absolutely no confidence in it. No reliance in it.

Turn to Philippians chapter 3 for a moment. Philippians chapter 3 verse 3. He says, “for we are the true circumcision, who . . . put no confidence in the flesh.” In other words, those who really belong to Christ put no confidence in themselves, in their own efforts, in their own achievements, in their own credentials. In fact, notice in this passage in Philippians 3 that boasting in the flesh is part of the essence of what it means to be a sinner. Notice how Paul describes himself before he came to Christ. He says, verse 4, “although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh,” he said I might have boasted in my flesh. I mean, look at my credentials. I was “circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law [that external conformity to the Law of God] blameless.” You see, that’s what sinners do. That’s what those who are not justified do is they cling to their own credentials. They cling to their own efforts. They cling to their own goodness, and they think that somehow that’s going to get them a place with God.

But the second kind of boasting in the New Testament is exactly the opposite of boasting in yourself and your own efforts and your own credentials and your own achievements. It’s boasting in Jesus Christ. In fact, notice in this passage of Philippians 3 that boasting in Christ is the ultimate evidence of being a true believer. You stop boasting in yourself and you start boasting in Jesus Christ. Notice verse 3 again, “for we are the true circumcision, who . . . glory in Christ Jesus”—who boast in Christ Jesus. And we, on the other hand put no confidence—we have no reliance on who we are or what we’ve done. Notice how this is illustrated in Paul’s life. You remember all of those things that he said were in his asset column here in Philippians 3? All those things that he said he had cause to boast in? Notice what happened when he came to Christ. Verse 7, “whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.” He even ends verse 8 by saying they were like rubbish—they were like refuse. They don’t matter any more. I’m not boasting in my credentials. I’m not boasting in my achievements. Now I’m boasting in Christ. So in Philippians chapter 1 verse 26, when Paul says he wants our proud confidence to abound in Christ, he means that he wants us to put our complete confidence, our complete reliance, our complete trust in Jesus Christ and Christ alone. And then he wants us to glory or boast in Christ, now that He’s become our complete reliance. Notice he says I want your boasting in Christ to abound. That means to have more than enough. It’s used in the gospels to describe what remained after Christ fed the large multitudes.

When I was growing up I never remember finishing a meal when there weren't left-overs. That's just the way it was done in my home. There were always left-overs, which is saying something when you're fixing for 12 people, as my mom was. That's what Paul is saying here though. He's saying I want you to boast in Christ until there are left-overs—until there's more than enough. I want it to abound. You see, who Christ is and what Christ has done serve as the grounds of our boasting. Paul wants us to direct all of our pride and all of our boasting toward Jesus Christ. He wants us to glory in Christ and Christ alone. This is one of his great ambitions in life. Not only should we have as our ambition to exalt Christ, to be with Christ, but we, like Paul, should live to bring others to boast in Christ. To bring others to live in delight in Christ.

But ultimately, all of our boasting—all of our glory—should trace itself back to one great eternal source. Turn to Galatians chapter 6. Galatians chapter 6 verse 14. Paul writes, “But may it never be”; let's start at verse 13, “For those who are circumcised do not even keep the Law themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh.” In other words, here's that other kind of boasting. Here's that boasting in your credentials and who you are and what you've accomplished. “But,” Paul says verse 14, “may it never be that I would boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Put positively, here's what Paul says. There's only one thing in all the world that I boast in. There's only one thing in all the world that I put my reliance in, my trust, my confidence, and therefore, glory and boast in. And that is the cross of Jesus Christ. Now why would Paul say that? What does he mean? I mean there are other places in the New Testament where he tells us to boast or glory in other things. Why does he say the only thing is the cross of Christ? Well, I think one writer is right when he puts it this way, “Apart from the cross, there is only judgment. Patience and mercy for a season, but then if spurned, all that mercy only serves to intensify the judgment. Therefore every good thing in life [listen to this...every good thing in life] and every bad thing that God turns for good, is a blood bought gift. And all boasting, all exultation should be boasting in the cross. Woe to me if I exult in any blessing of any kind at any time unless my exulting is an exulting in the cross of Christ.” What's he saying? He's saying that everything that you and I enjoy—the fact that we sit here this moment still breathing—comes to us as a gift, purchased by the cross of Jesus Christ. Every good thing we enjoy in life—all of the temporal blessings that are ours—the family and food and friends, the fellowship we enjoy as a part of this life, clothing and a roof over our heads, the fact that God spares us at times from accidents that occur, that God continues to provide life for our bodies and food for our tables. All of those things, both temporally, and all of those things that are ours eternally come to us from the hand of God. But they're only made possible by the cross of Jesus Christ. If it weren't for the cross, folks, we, this moment, would be in hell eternally separated from God. The very first moment we ever breathed a sin we would be in God's judgment and in His wrath. Every good thing that we enjoy and every thing that's evil that God turns to good in our lives, is ultimately coming to us through the cross of Jesus Christ, purchased by the death of Christ. That's why Paul says, the only thing I glory in, the only thing I boast in, the only thing that has my reliance is the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary.

It's because we glory in the cross that it's our joy to remember it in the elements of the bread and the cup. This morning we're going to partake of the Lord's table. And it's simply a picture of what Christ accomplished for us at the cross, and that is, everything. Everything. It's one way, as we partake of it, to show that we really do boast—we find our place of trust, confidence, and reliance, and the thing we glory in—the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. As the men come, let's take a few moments of silent prayer, confess our sins, and to thank the Lord for the wonderful gift that He gives us in the cross of Christ. Let's pray together.