**Be Free through A Proper Perspective**

Philippians 1:21-1:30

You will remember that Paul's letter to the church at Philippi was written while he was imprisoned, literally shackled to a guard 24 hours a day.

Yet no portion of the Bible has more to say about the subject of joy.

Paul refuses to allow the restrictions in his life to become a cause of bitterness, and instead looked to see what God given opportunities he might see in them. Paul knew that joy is a choice.

But life sure can get complicated, can't it?

Sometimes life's frustrations are captured very well in cartoons.

Charles Schulz in his famous “Peanuts” cartoon captures the problem that we are going to be looking at today. In one particular cartoon, Lucy has the floor, delivering one of her lectures.

“Charlie Brown,” she begins “life is a lot like a deck chair. Some place it so that they can see where they are going. Others place it where they can see where they have been. And some so they can see where they are at the present.”

Charlie sighs, and says, “I can't even get mine unfolded.”

I am sure that more than a few of us can identify with Charlie Brown.

Some times our perspective gets a little out of wack.”

Perhaps the greatest challenge to our joy to being free is learning to live with the proper perspective.

Learning what is important in life and what is not!

When we lose perspective in life, we also lose joy.

When we do not see the difference between good and best, we do have perspective.

When we do not see the difference between the means and the ends in life, we do not have perspective.

When we do not see the difference between the temporary and the eternal, we do not have perspective.

**First, Be Free In Living With A Proper Perspective On The Eternal.. (vv. 21-23)**

“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. (22) But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. (23) For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.”

Paul uses a word (senechomai) (v. 23) to describe his situation of being between pressed by two different options.

It is a picture of a traveler in a narrow path between two solid walls of rock.

Paul says that there are two alternatives in life and he assesses each alternative.

He says, “I am either going to live or I am going to die this year.”

And it appears to me that those are two broad possibilities that we all face.

Paul says that one possibility is to remain here and the other is death, which means departure.

He uses a Greek term right out of his own vocation as a tent maker – the term means to “strike your tent or pull your tent down.”

So death to him was merely a change of location.

It was the pulling down your tent and moving and setting up someplace new.

It's no big thing.

It is just a departure.

Paul says, “Death is just departure, just picking up your tent and moving someplace else.”

I have always liked the story that is told about John Quincy Adams, the sixth President of the United States .

“When John Quincy Adams was eighty years of age a friend asked him, “Well, how is John Quincy Adams?”

“Thank you,” he replied, “John Quincy Adams is quite well. But the house where he lives is becoming dilapidated. It is tottering. Time and the seasons have nearly destroyed it, and it is becoming quite uninhabitable. I shall have to move out of it soon. But John Quincy Adams is quite well, thank you.”

John Quincy Adams understood what Paul was talking about.

The benefit to Paul was that he would instantly be with the Lord in Heaven.

In 2 Corinthians 5:6, 8 we read, “So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord …. (8) We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.”

To die for Paul would not be a tragedy but instead it would be the realization of his hope and expectation.

On one hand death would be a release from all the toils and troubles of this life; and more than that, death is the gateway into Christ's presence.

Now hear this … The truth is that only those who are prepared to die, are ready to live.

The liabilities would be that his death would deprave those who needed him of his presence.

He could no longer be a witness to the guards, He could no longer be an encouragement to the Church, he could no longer be a voice for further missionary outreach.

Paul says, “I don't know which alternative I would choose.”

But in reality the choice is not his to make, it is made for him.

When we arrive at such dilemmas in life and unable to decipher the right direction to go, if we hope to maintain our joy in the process, we must let the LORD to be our guide.

When we do then the pressure is lifted from our shoulders.

Paul knew that the entire Roman Empire could not touch him as long as God was using him and the church needed him.

Augustine said, “Man is immortal until his work is done.”

What a blessing to realize we are immortal until our work is done.

No one can touch us, Death cannot take us until God is through with what he is doing in us, and through us.

That is why Jesus could stand before Pontius Pilate and say, “You have no power over me. You can't take my life” (John 19:11 )

He knew that God was not through with him yet.

On the cross, Jesus said, “It is finished” (John 19:30 ).

Yet it was his work that was finished and not his life.

He didn't say, “I am finished.”

Think about it He was not referring to his death.

He was referring to the work that had been accomplished.

It was finished, and so he could go home.

He had done everything that the Father wanted to do through Him so he was free to return to his home in heaven.

That is why Paul could say to Timothy at the end of his life, “I have finished the race.” (2 Tim. 4:7).

He knew that he would fall before the executioner in a matter of weeks if not days.

He says this because he knew then his work was done.

That is the perspective that we too should live with.

Therefore, there can never be, for a Christian, an untimely death.

Did you hear that… for a Christian there can never be an untimely death.

We go when God has wrapped up the work he is going to do in our lives and through our lives, and not one second before.

And when we go, others should know it was God's time.

He had finished his work.

Many of you have read books by the author, Barbara Johnson, who wrote such books as, “Stick a Geranium in your Hat and Be Happy” and “Splashes of Joy in the Cesspools of Life.”

Her life however, has been anything but hilarious.

Her oldest son, Steve was killed in 1968 in Vietnam .

But that is not all just a few years ago, she was in the mortuary identifying the body of her son Steve, who had been killed by a drunk driver.

She writes of that time, “We were mad at God?

Yes we were.

But lying deep beneath all these feeling was our faith that god makes no mistakes.

He has never had to say, “Oops!”

God didn't cause that drunken driver to cross the center line.

Despite all of our questions and our bitter grief, we still knew deep down, that nothing ever happens to us that God doesn't know about.

God still loved us, and He was there for us in our grief, in our pain – and in our anger.

And I found myself thanking God that he took at a time when he was closer to God than at any other time in his life.”

Eventually Barbara Johnson, worked through her grief, she regained her perspective on the eternal and she regained her joy.

Paul goes on to say, in verse twenty-four, “Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you. (25) and being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, (26) that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to your again.”

**You Can Be Free In Living With A Proper Perspective On The Eternal and…..**

**Secondly, You Can Be Free In Living With A Proper Perspective On Our Citizenship (v. 27)**

“Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit,”

The words “let your conduct” are derived from (polituesthe) meaning “behave as citizens.”

Philippi was a colony of Roman and they were very proud of their status as citizens of Rome (Acts 16:20 -21).

While the people of Philippi enjoyed the privileges and fulfilled the responsibilities of their Roman citizenship, Paul reminded these Philippian believers that they in fact had a dual citizenship, for as Christians they were considered citizens of Heaven.

Paul later in this same letter says (3:20-21), “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, (21) who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”

Paul is reminding these believers that they should also live as citizens of heaven, with all the responsibilities that status entailed.

Specifically Paul admonishes the Philippian believers to behave as citizens of heaven by getting along well with one another.

Paul warned that disputes and grudges would drive a wedge into the church.

We are called to work hard at healing and working to mend offenses within the body.

As Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians, we are called “to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3).

Getting along with each other specifically meant standing fast literally fighting side by side as in a military battle or a gladiatorial contest.

**You Can Be Free In Living With A Proper Perspective On Our Citizenship And….**

**Third, You Can Be Free In Living With A Proper Perspective On Hardships (vv. 28-30)**

“and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God. (29) For to you it has been granted on behalf of the Christ, no only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, (30) having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me.”

When believers really start to work together to accomplish something for Christ, there will be opposition.

Paul uses a word in verse twenty eight translated “in any way terrified” (ptoromemoi) which describes a horse shying out of fear of something.

Paul says that rather than being terrified by opposition we should be reassured.

The word translated “token” in the King James Version and “proof” in the New King James Version.

It is rendered “omen” in the Revised Standard Version and “sign” in the New International Version.

In every case the idea is of an undeniable manifestation of reality.

The presence of opposition should always be a sign to us we are not of this world.

Remember then that: be Free…   
With A Proper Perspective On The Eternal.   
With A Proper Perspective On Our Citizenship   
With A Proper Perspective On Hardships

let's take a little quiz. How would you complete the following sentence? “For to me to live is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.”

What word or phrase would you put in the blank?

If your name is Michael Jordan, the word is “basketball.”

If you are Mark McGwire or Sammy Sosa, you might say “home runs.”

If your name is Bill Gates, the word might be “Microsoft.”

If you are a parent, the word might be “children.”

A politician might say “winning the election.”  
A lawyer might say “winning the big case.”  
If you are in high school, you might say “going to Homecoming.”  
The list of possibilities is endless.

It could be fun or school or sex or entertainment or money or college or career or winning the big game.

Don't miss the point.

No one leaves that sentence blank.

Everyone finishes it with something.

If you don't fill the blank with Christ, what do you put there?

One final story and I am done.

In 1858 a young man named John G. Paton felt called of God to leave his ministry in Glasgow , Scotland , to go as a missionary to the New Hebrides islands in the South Pacific.

In those days missionary ventures were greeted with disdain and opposition—in part because of the great danger attendant to preaching the gospel to people regarded as uncivilized.

An elderly gentlemen warned John Paton: “You will be eaten by cannibals.”

“Mr. Dickson,” Paton replied, “You are advanced in years now, and your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave, there to be eaten by worms; I confess to you, that if I can but live and die serving and honoring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by cannibals or by worms; and in the Great Day my resurrection body will arise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen Redeemer.”

Only one life, 'Twill soon be past  
Only what's done for Christ will last.

What will death be like for you?

You can never say “To die is gain” unless you can also say “For to me to live is Christ.”

If you cannot say “To live is Christ,” how can you be sure that “to die is gain?”

We always come back to Jesus, don't we? If you are afraid to die, perhaps it is because you don't know Jesus.

How should we face death?

Not with defiance, not in desperation, but with simple childlike trust.

When the time of your death arrives, put your hand in God's hand and let him guide you safely home.

Death is the narrow passageway between this life and the next.

We toddle like little children down that frightening passageway with eyes full of fear.

If only we could see that Jesus stands like a mother watching her children learn to walk.

This is what death is like?just one more step and we'll be there—safe in the arms of Jesus forever.

The application is simple:  
1. Do what God gives you to do today.  
2. Trust God with tomorrow.  
3. Death when it comes will be a great gain for you.

When all is said and done, there are only two philosophies of life.

You can say with the Apostle Paul “To me to live is Christ and to die is gain” or you can say with the world “To me to live is self and to die is loss.”

Which will it be for you?