REDEEMER CHURCH

Piketon, Ohio

Christ Our Life, Our Hope, and Our Strength

A reflection on Philippians 1:21-30

Pastor Jason Boothe

“For to me to live is Christ,
and to die is gain.”

PHILIPPIANS 1:21 | KING JAMES VERSION

Proclaiming God’s Free and Sovereign Grace in Christ

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Just a few years ago, I was rushed to the hospital, doubled over in pain. After several agonizing hours, I learned that my pancreas was not functioning properly. Major surgery would be necessary to try to address the problem. What I had assumed was indigestion or a stomach bug became a medical crisis that radically changed my life.

A familiar routine can change in an instant. Suddenly, questions we scarcely considered yesterday become deeply personal. We find ourselves wondering what the coming months will hold and how much of life will ever feel familiar again.

Ah, but we have the blessed promises of God!

Those promises speak directly into our uncertainty. From a hospital bed, the assurance that we belong to Christ takes on a particular sweetness. We may have to wait for answers about our health, but we can rest in the faithful care of the Saviour who redeemed us. Our lives remain in His hands.

Writing from imprisonment, the apostle Paul gives us a confession strong enough to bear the weight of those concerns:

> *"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."*
>
> **Philippians 1:21, KJV**

Paul understood that his imprisonment might end in death. He also knew that release could allow him to continue ministering among people he dearly loved. Either outcome rested in the hands of his Saviour.

That was the foundation of his confidence. He belonged to Christ.

Everyone who trusts in Jesus shares this assurance. The Lord who redeemed us holds our remaining days, and His saving purpose reaches beyond the grave. Our circumstances may leave us with unanswered questions, but our future is secure in Him.

A Life Made New by Grace

Paul's confession becomes even more remarkable when we remember the man he had been. Convinced of his own religious righteousness, he persecuted the church and opposed the very Saviour he would later proclaim.

Then Christ laid hold of him.

His conversion displayed the sovereign mercy of God toward a guilty sinner. Everything that followed grew from that gracious intervention. Paul loved Christ because Christ had first loved him.

He wrote:

> *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."*
>
> **Galatians 2:20, KJV**

Those closing words carry the warmth of personal assurance: "who loved me, and gave himself for me." Paul understood that the Son of God had willingly given Himself to secure his salvation.

At Calvary, the Lord Jesus bore the sins of His people and satisfied divine justice on their behalf. His sacrifice accomplished their redemption. His resurrection declares His victory over death, and all who are united to Him share in the life He gives.

Our spiritual life begins in this sovereign grace. Through regeneration, the Holy Spirit makes the sinner alive, awakening the heart to its need and bringing it to rest in the sufficiency of Christ.

> *"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,*
> *Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)"*
>
> **Ephesians 2:4-5, KJV**

We owe our salvation entirely to the mercy of God. Remembering this gives us reason for gratitude and teaches us humility toward others who need the same grace.

It also gives purpose to ordinary life. Because we belong to Christ, our daily responsibilities become opportunities to honour Him. His mercy shapes the patience we show at home and the honesty we practice at work. As we remember how freely He has forgiven us, we learn to forgive those who have wronged us.

Perhaps illness or advancing age has limited what you can do. You remember seasons when you had more energy, and you wonder what usefulness remains.

Consider where Paul was when he wrote these words. Confinement had restricted his activities, yet Christ continued to give meaning to his life. The Lord was still working through him.

The same Saviour cares for you. A prayer offered from a sickbed may express a lifetime of dependence upon Him. A quiet conversation may bring comfort to someone who desperately needs it. Even your willingness to receive help can give another believer an opportunity to show Christ's love.

You remain precious to the One who purchased you with His blood.

The Hope of Being with Christ

Paul’s words about death deserve tender attention. He explains why dying would be gain:

> *“For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better:”*
>
> **Philippians 1:23, KJV**

The heart of his hope is being with Christ.

The Saviour who had forgiven him would receive him into His presence. His earthly pilgrimage would end in the conscious enjoyment of fellowship with the Lord he loved.

This assurance belongs to every believer:

> *“We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.”*
>
> **2 Corinthians 5:8, KJV**

At death, the believer’s soul enters Christ’s presence while the body awaits resurrection. When the Lord Jesus returns bodily, He will raise His people in glory.

> *“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:*
> *Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.”*
>
> **Philippians 3:20-21, KJV**

The Lord’s saving purpose embraces the whole person. These bodies, subject to weakness and disease, will be transformed by His power and fashioned like His glorious body.

Such promises bring comfort into the sorrow of bereavement. An empty place at the table can awaken grief long after the funeral. Sometimes a familiar song brings tears before we have time to prepare ourselves. We miss those we love, and the ache can be profound.

The gospel gives us hope within that sorrow. Believers who have died are with Christ, and His promise of resurrection remains certain. Their earthly suffering has ended. Their Redeemer will complete all that He has promised.

Our own confidence rests upon the same finished work. The righteousness that secures our acceptance before God today will be sufficient when our final hour comes. Jesus will faithfully receive everyone whom He has redeemed.

Until then, we entrust the timing of our departure to Him and receive each remaining day as a gift.

The People Who Need Us Today

Paul's longing for Christ's presence is accompanied by a deep affection for the congregation:

> *"Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you."*
>
> **Philippians 1:24, KJV**

There were believers who needed his encouragement. They faced opposition, and their understanding of the gospel was still growing. Paul gladly embraced the prospect of remaining for their benefit:

> *"And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith;*
> *That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again."*
>
> **Philippians 1:25-26, KJV**

He wanted their faith to deepen and their joy in Christ to increase. The thought of serving them gave purpose to his remaining days.

Grace works this concern for others into our hearts as well. We begin to notice the person who has grown quiet or the newer believer who needs someone to open the Scriptures with them. Opportunities to serve are often close at hand, woven into relationships we already have.

A visit may bring comfort that lasts for days. Patient attention can communicate love more deeply than we realize. Sometimes a conversation after worship helps someone face a difficult week with renewed confidence in the Lord.

Who might be strengthened by your presence today?

You can care for someone even while you are still learning how best to help. Make time to listen. As the opportunity arises, speak gently of the Saviour whose grace has sustained you.

Experiences of weakness can make us more attentive to the burdens others carry. Having needed help ourselves, we may become more willing to offer it patiently. The Lord can use even painful chapters of our lives to deepen our compassion.

At Redeemer Church, we desire a fellowship in which this kind of care grows naturally from our shared faith. A deeper understanding of God's free and sovereign grace should make us increasingly attentive to the people He places beside us.

Standing Together in the Gospel

This concern for one another belongs to the congregation's larger calling. Paul writes:

> *"Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;"*
>
> **Philippians 1:27, KJV**

Here, "conversation" refers to their whole manner of life. The gospel they confess is to shape their conduct, including the way they live and labour together.

Every believer stands before God through the righteousness of the same Saviour. Each has received mercy freely. Remembering our common dependence upon Christ helps us deal patiently with one another.

There will be occasions when we need to apologize. We may realize that we judged someone hastily or spoke without sufficient care. As members practice repentance and extend forgiveness, the congregation grows in the humility that grace teaches.

This unity is rooted in "the faith of the gospel." We stand together around the truth of Christ's person and saving work. Scripture governs our confession, and His mercy shapes the spirit in which we hold it.

Paul also recognizes the pressure of opposition:

> *"And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God."*
>
> **Philippians 1:28, KJV**

The Philippians need courage to continue confessing Christ when doing so brings hostility. Their perseverance points to God's preserving work and their final salvation. Opposition to Christ, meanwhile, carries the solemn warning of judgment.

Both realities should shape our response. We can stand firmly in the gospel while praying with compassion for those who oppose it. The apostle writing this letter had once been an enemy of the church himself.

God's mercy had reached him. We have every reason to pray that the Lord will graciously save others who presently resist His truth.

Kept Through the Conflict

Paul then brings the congregation's faith and suffering under the gracious sovereignty of God:

> *"For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake;"*
>
> **Philippians 1:29, KJV**

Believing on Christ is itself a gift of grace. God makes the heart willing, and the sinner comes freely to the Saviour, trusting Him for salvation. Even our coming to Christ gives us reason to praise the Lord who drew us.

Paul also speaks specifically of suffering for Christ's sake. These believers face opposition because they belong to Jesus. That painful conflict remains within the sovereign care of their heavenly Father.

Those who wrong them remain accountable for their actions. Yet their hostility cannot overturn God's saving purpose or separate His people from His love.

Perhaps your confession of Christ has cost you someone's approval. Faithfulness to Scripture may have brought strain into a relationship you treasure. Such wounds can be especially painful because you continue to love the person who has rejected you.

The Lord knows what you carry.

He sees the cost of your faithfulness and sustains you through it. Christ has fully answered for your sins at Calvary. You face this trial as someone already redeemed, held securely by the Saviour whose name you bear.

Paul reminds the Philippians that their struggle is shared:

> *"Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me."*
>
> **Philippians 1:30, KJV**

Their experience joins them to fellow believers who also depend upon God's sustaining grace. Within the church, we help one another endure by remembering that shared dependence and bearing one another's burdens.

Above all, we have Christ's own promise:

> *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:*
> *And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."*
>
> **John 10:27-28, KJV**

His keeping power strengthens us to continue. He preserves His people through the trials of faith, faithfully bringing them toward the glory He has promised.

Our Days Belong to Him

That hospital visit changed my life. What began as something I thought would pass became a reminder of how quickly our circumstances can change. Many of you have your own story of receiving unexpected news or facing a future you had never imagined.

Into those moments, the Word of God speaks with enduring certainty. Jesus Christ has accomplished a complete salvation for His people. His blood truly covers their sins. His righteousness secures their acceptance before God, and His faithful care extends through every remaining day.

Dear believer, receive today from His hand. There may be work before you that feels ordinary or a burden that seems difficult to bear. Bring it to the Lord in prayer. Ask Him for grace to serve the people within your reach and for strength to trust Him with what lies beyond it.

The Saviour who redeemed you will keep you.

And if you have never found rest in Christ, hear His gracious promise:

> *“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”*
>
> **John 6:37, KJV**

Come with your guilt and your need. You may be painfully aware of how often you have failed or how far you have wandered. His promise speaks directly to the sinner who comes: “I will in no wise cast out.”

There is full salvation in the Lord Jesus. Everyone who comes to Him is received.

This is the hope we proclaim at Redeemer Church of Piketon, Ohio. Through God’s free and sovereign grace, believers belong to Christ for life and for eternity. He gives purpose to our service now, and when that service is complete, He will receive us into His presence.

Whatever the coming months may hold, His promises will stand. With Paul, we may therefore confess:

> *“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”*
>
> **Philippians 1:21, KJV**

About the Author

Pastor Jason Boothe

Pastor Jason K. Boothe has served as senior pastor of Redeemer Church of Piketon, Ohio, since 2001. His preaching and writing emphasize the gospel of God's free and sovereign grace, the finished work of Jesus Christ, and the assurance believers find in their faithful Saviour.

He holds a Bachelor of Arts in U.S. History from Shawnee State University, a Master of Education in Secondary Education from Grand Canyon University, and a Doctor of Theology from Andersonville Theological Seminary. Through his sermons and publications, he seeks to help readers understand the Scriptures and rest in the sufficiency of Christ.

Discover the Gospel of God's Free and Sovereign Grace

We invite you to learn more about the complete salvation found in Jesus Christ. Explore the gospel, read biblical teaching, and get to know the ministry of Redeemer Church of Piketon, Ohio.

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Scripture quotations are from the King James Version.