
Christ is the Message

DAVE BAST

Are you interested in having a life marked by real joy, deep peace, and lasting purpose? Well, you can find all those things in a life that is centered on Jesus Christ, as a brief letter written almost two thousand years ago explains. Which letter, you ask? Stay tuned.

Dave Bast; From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast, and joining me today, and for a series of four programs, is Pastor Duane Kelderman. Duane has been a pastor in a congregation for many years. He has been a seminary administrator. He is also a friend and a co-worker; so, Duane, welcome to *Groundwork*.

DUANE KELDERMAN

It is good to be here, and I am looking forward to this series.

DAVE BAST

I am too, and we have chosen together to work our way through the little book of Philippians. I said in the opening that there is a letter that can explain about real joy and lasting peace, and to no one's surprise, I guess, listening to this program, it is going to be from the New Testament; and the book we have chosen is the short letter of Paul to the church in Philippi – Philippians.

DUANE KELDERMAN

It is a great book, and I think the phrase: To live is Christ, is probably one of the best ways to capture the power of Philippians – the theme of Philippians – and the note of joy that comes through this book; the word joy I think appears 15 times in this book...

DAVE BAST

Right.

DUANE KELDERMAN

And yet, the fact that this book that we always associate with joy also had a lot of suffering in it – a lot of problems in it.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

DUANE KELDERMAN

I think most of our listeners can relate to having challenges and problems in their lives, and to think of that life still having all kinds of joy makes this a very hopeful book.

DAVE BAST

Well, just that phrase that you mentioned: To live is Christ. That comes out of Chapter 1; it is Philippians 1, I think it is verse 21, and a famous statement of Paul, where he says: For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain; so, we are calling the whole series the Christ Centered Life; the life that is really focused on and rooted in and centered on Jesus Christ; and just a little bit of background to the letter; Paul wrote those words as he was facing trial in a Roman court, where his life was at stake. When he says: For me to live is Christ and to

die is gain, it was not just theoretical; it was a very real prospect, as he looked ahead. He was in jail, even, at the time.

DUANE KELDERMAN

It really is amazing to think that he writes this book from being in prison. It is amazing that a book with this much gratitude, this much joy, this much hope, this much thanksgiving for all that has gone on in his ministry here is written when his personal circumstances are as dire as they are.

DAVE BAST

We know that he is imprisoned in Rome – in the city of Rome – from the letter itself. There are some letters of Paul where we are not sure where he was when and where he wrote them; but here, he says outright where he is, and we put together the story from the book of Acts. The last chapters of Acts tell how Paul was arrested originally in Jerusalem when his life was threatened there by the mob and the religious leaders. The Romans took him into protective custody. He spent two years in prison in Palestine, and then he appealed his case to Caesar, so they shipped him off to Rome. He had always wanted to go to Rome. I do not think he expected that when he got there would be as a Roman prisoner; and so, the issue for his life or his death was going to be in Caesar's hands. Probably – this gives one pause, I think, to think of it – probably the Caesar in question was the Emperor Nero, who was not a real nice guy. So, this is how Paul writes the letter. He is not necessarily in a prison – in a jail as we think of it – he is confined in his own apartment – rented apartment. He has a soldier chained to him, as Luke describes at the end of Acts. He is free to receive visitors, but he is just waiting; and when the day comes when Caesar says: Okay, I will hear your case; Paul is either going to be pardoned and set free or he is going to be executed.

DUANE KELDERMAN

Isn't it amazing that Paul, with all those things going on in his life, all of his own personal suffering and conflict, has so much focus on the Philippians. It is so obvious from this book that he has a deep personal relationship with this Philippian church. He loves these people, and these people love him. In verses 3 and 4: ³I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴In all my prayers for all of you I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the Gospel. There, and many other places in the book it is obvious that he has a deep, warm relationship with the Philippian church.

DAVE BAST

Right; and this great phrase: Partnership in the Gospel; that is what he is thankful for above all else. Paul had actually planted the church in Philippi; again, we go to the book of Acts for the story, and it is told in Acts Chapter 16, how Paul came there with Luke and with a colleague called Silas, and they found no Christians there; almost no Jews. Philippi had been a Roman colony, and it was especially populated by retired Roman soldiers. That is how the city was begun probably a hundred years earlier, to settle veterans from the Roman army. So, it was almost exclusively gentile; and Paul found these few people who gathered by the side of the river for prayer – Lydia was one of them – a visiting businesswoman; and this wonderful story, how Paul brought the Gospel there, and pretty soon there was a little church; and then they were arrested and hauled before the authorities and thrown in jail, and there was an earthquake and all that you can read about in Acts; but this church bonded with him, and he with them; and so they stood by him as he went on to other places. They supported him. In essence, he was one of their missionaries.

DUANE KELDERMAN

It is interesting that Paul, most of the time, begins his letters saying: I thank God for you; and even in churches where he had big problems – big problems, like Corinth, for example, he thanks God for them, and he thanks God for these people as well; and then he always begins with a prayer, and my prayer for you is, and I just think it is so interesting in verse 9:

And this is my prayer; that your love may abound more and more – your love may abound more and more – in knowledge and depth of insight. How is that tested? How do we know whether that is happening; whether your love is abounding in knowledge and insight; ¹⁰so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ; ¹¹filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus

Christ to the glory and praise of God.

Ultimately, Paul sees the answer to prayer for these people as being manifested in love – that they love one another – that they love Christ – and that love is not just a feeling; it is a knowledge; it is the depth of insight that leads to purity and righteousness. It is a rich prayer for them.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; he is praying for their growth; and you think about, well, how do we grow? Well, we grow in knowledge; we learn more as time goes on; and we should be learning more as Christians. We should understand more about the Bible; and he wants them to grow in their personal conduct; in their goodness; in their righteousness, he calls it. Become better people. Do more of what you ought to do and less of what you should not do. That is important growth; but the depth of it is, he wants them to grow in love; and as you say, love for God, love for each other, love for him, his love for them. It is a great goal, and all of that is bound up in this idea of being partners in something; and Paul calls it partnership in the Gospel, which I take as kind of a shorthand for a lot of stuff; and we want to look at that next.

Segment 2

DUANE KELDERMAN

You are listening to *Groundwork*. I am Duane Kelderman.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast, and Duane, today we are digging into the book of Philippians to discover the benefits of a life centered in Christ, and we are talking about Paul's situation as he wrote this letter, and his wonderful relationship with the Philippian church.

DUANE KELDERMAN

It is very interesting to hear Paul now in verses 12 and following:

¹²Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the Gospel. Paul is interested in the Gospel. He is not so interested in his personal circumstances. ¹³As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and everyone else that I am in chains for Christ; ¹⁴and because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the Gospel without fear.

Paul has this deep interest in the Gospel – the work of the Gospel. The other thing that I think is so clear in these verses is a belief in the providence of God. Throughout this book, we will see how Paul refers to his personal circumstances, but then to paraphrase, says: But you know, this all fits into a bigger plan that God had for me, for you, for the Gospel, for the Church at large. Paul has such a belief in the providence of God.

DAVE BAST

Right. He is so focused. I just cannot imagine myself, if I were in that situation, reacting the way he does. He is so committed to this Gospel, as he calls it, which is the cause of Christ in the world; which is the message of Christ; which is the growth of the Church. All of those things are implied in that word, Gospel. That is what matters to him. You know, the Philippians actually had sent money to him because he lived... Luke says, again, I referred earlier to the end of the book of Acts, where Luke describes a little bit more of Paul's situation. He says he lived in Rome for two years at his own expense, and welcomed all those who came. Here, Paul reminds us that while he is living there he has chains on, so he is chained to a soldier, but he is renting an apartment – some little room where he can live and receive people and witness to them; and he says the whole palace guard knows. So, they must have had soldiers rotating around the clock; and as soon as a new guard sat down and put the chain on, Paul starts telling him about Jesus. And so, the Philippians had sent a messenger with money to support him, and they wanted to know how he was doing, and all Paul wants to talk about is how his situation is actually serving to make the Gospel go forward.

DUANE KELDERMAN

There is something really countercultural about Paul's perspective here. I think in North American culture it has often been called a therapeutic culture. We are very concerned, and legitimately so, about our own

feelings; our own personal circumstances; our pain; and certainly a part of Christian love and hospitality is being sensitive to the pain of others, and our own pain and what we are going through; but Paul had a way of so quickly wanting to subordinate that to a bigger picture; and I think that is countercultural. I do not think that we so quickly in our culture are able to put it into that bigger perspective. That is one of the powerful things about the Christian life; that seeing that our pain is not the end. Our pain fits into a bigger picture. This chapter ends with Paul actually making it clear that suffering is going to be a part of following Christ. This whole Christian journey is going to involve some suffering; but Paul does not stop with the suffering. He so quickly puts it into this bigger picture.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; it can serve a purpose bigger than us. I was just thinking as you were talking about a young man I know. His name is Steve Laman, and he is, I think without doubt, the most popular writer that we have at Words of Hope. We publish a little devotional booklet, as you know; and it has messages that help people study the Bible and read it, and then have a devotional thought from it. Steve Laman writes periodically for us; he has cerebral palsy since birth; he cannot walk; he cannot speak; he uses a computer to synthesize his speech. He lives in a motorized wheelchair. I mean, you talk about suffering; this guy – he is now over 40, and he spent his whole life this way – and he will say again and again, “No, I do not wish I had this. I wish I could live a normal life – you know, all those other things I cannot do; but God is using me. I am convinced that God is using me to speak to others,” and that is exactly the countercultural spirit that Paul has.

DUANE KELDERMAN

Yes. We know from these verses that there was some rivalry among leaders in this church.

DAVE BAST

In Rome; he is talking about the Roman church, now; where he is.

DUANE KELDERMAN

Right; and he says: Okay, I know that some people preach Christ out of selfish ambition. They are not sincere; they are causing trouble for me; and I know that there are some people out there who are deliberately trying to hurt me.

DAVE BAST

So, wait a minute; let’s get this straight. He has just said that his situation and his boldness for Christ despite his imprisonment has encouraged the Christians in Rome to witness more; but then he adds, some of them are doing it because they do not like me and because their ego needs are being met by doing this. You are saying that Christians might do that, even Christian leaders?

DUANE KELDERMAN

Every once in a while, I hear about that.

DAVE BAST

Yes, really? I cannot believe it.

DUANE KELDERMAN

The natural reaction is to want to defend – maybe even to hurt back – people who are hurting us; but Paul is so grounded in Jesus Christ that he is able to say: Hey, we all have mixed motives. At the end of the day, there is only one thing I care about, and that is that Christ is preached.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; three times in these verses from the middle of Chapter 1 – verses 15 through 18 – he uses the phrase “preach Christ; Christ is preached;” that is the message, and he can even say: I know some people are doing it out of the wrong motivation. They are doing it because they do not like me and they think the more Christ is talked about, the more likely it is the Romans will see me as a problem and execute me. That is

horrible; but as long as Christ is... Paul seems to say even preachers who have the wrong motives, if they get the message right, some people will hear and believe it. There is just this overwhelming sense that it is really important to tell people about Jesus.

DUANE KELDERMAN

Well, and it is also hopeful for us as Christians to realize that God can even use mixed motives. The fact is, we all have mixed motives. There is always a mixture of motives in everything we do, and Paul's point is that just because we have mixed motives does not mean that God cannot use it. Now, obviously we are always wanting to try to clarify our motives; get our motives as correct as we can have those motives; but the fact that there is a mixed motive in what we do – that we live conflicted lives – does not mean that God still cannot use what we do, and I think Paul's word here is just get to Christ – get to Christ – and the message will take over.

DAVE BAST

Yes; you know, these mixed motives – it is the reason why none of us ever does anything truly good. There is always a little bit of self mixed up in it. We think we are altruistic, but... and I was just thinking about this – I was struggling with it recently, thinking about preaching. Am I doing this because it strokes my ego? And to some degree, the answer is yes. I wish it weren't. I wish I were purely spiritual, you know, but it is okay; as long as we are doing the right thing. Years ago I remember reading the testimony of a Scottish Puritan on his deathbed. He said, "I have taken all my good works and all my bad works and I have cast them together in a heap and I have fled from both to Christ; and in him I find peace." So, just, you know, do the right thing; leave your motives in a heap; ask God to forgive them and stick to Christ.

DUANE KELDERMAN

Yes; it is easy to say: Preach Christ. I think it is worth exploring exactly what does it mean to preach Christ, and we will explore that more in just a moment.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

This is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. Today, along with Duane Kelderman, I am Dave Bast, and we are focusing on what does it mean now to preach Christ; as you were just saying, Duane, that is the heart of it; and there is a kind of superficial idea. I do not think when Paul says the real key is that in all of us in all of our lives need to be preaching Christ, that we do not just say, well Jesus is a good example, let's imitate him.

DUANE KELDERMAN

Exactly. When we talk about preaching Christ, we are talking about preaching Christ in relationship to his work; what he did for us; his death, his resurrection, his ascension into heaven, his session at the right hand of God. It is the full work of God that we have in mind when we are preaching Christ.

DAVE BAST

Yes; I think of what he says in 1 Corinthians 2: I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

DUANE KELDERMAN

Exactly.

DAVE BAST

It is what Christ did for us, to save us; that is at the heart of it.

DUANE KELDERMAN

And when we talk about preaching Christ, we are even talking about Christ in his work of creation. Sometimes it is easy just to limit Christ to his work of salvation, but that Christ was in the beginning and he

was there at creation with God the Father and the Spirit.

DAVE BAST

Yes; we are going to look in the next program at one of the truly foundational passages of the New Testament that sketches out the person of Christ – who he really was; and that is at the heart... I mean, Christ is at the center of our Creed, if we confess our faith. If you are part of a church that still recites the Apostles' Creed, most of it is about Jesus. It starts with something about God the Father and ends with something about the Holy Spirit and the Church and so on, but the big, central section is all about Jesus Christ and who he was and what he did.

DUANE KELDERMAN

And Christian worship is so centered on Christ. We always talk about Christian worship as being Trinitarian – it involves God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit; but if you think about the sacraments – the Lord's Supper and baptism – it always brings us to Christ – our union with Christ.

DAVE BAST

You know, it is relatively easy to preach, and you can be vague, and some preachers are vague, and some of them are moralistic and they are just telling people: Be good, be good, be good; but you cannot break the bread and pour out the cup without focusing in on who Jesus was, again, and what he did for us. So, for Paul, this is at the heart of everything; and it is not just preachers who preach Christ. All of us need to be preaching Jesus Christ with our lives and with our words.

You know, he talks here again at the beginning of Chapter 1 about his confidence that because they have come to believe in Christ, that is a sign that God is working in their lives – these Philippian Christians – and that gives Paul confidence for the future as well.

DUANE KELDERMAN

Paul, of course, did not know what was going to happen in his own future...

DAVE BAST

For me to live is Christ, but to die is gain, yes.

DUANE KELDERMAN

Exactly; and that is where we go now in this chapter; verse 21:

For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. He can put his whole life in the perspective of living for Christ; and then, of course, that is what it is all about – he wants to live a life that is worthy of the Lord.

DAVE BAST

And he wants them to do the same thing, which is why he is writing them.

Well, thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation, and do not forget, it is listeners like you asking questions and participating that keep our topics relevant to your life. So, tell us what you think about what you are hearing and suggest topics or passages you would like to hear on future *Groundwork* programs. Visit us at groundworkonline.com and join the conversation.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/christ-is-the-message>

Printed on April 1, 2025