

Background to Philippians

- The church in Philippi was the first Christian church in Europe, founded by Paul, and marking a huge strategic step in spread of the gospel:
 - Story of its foundation in Acts 16:11-40;
 - Lydia, the seller of purple cloth;
 - the slave girl freed from her demon possession;
 - The jailer, earthquake, and a coming to faith.
- A church near to Paul's heart, people he loved.
- Often Paul wrote to address some pressing problem in a church's life:
 - doesn't seem to have been the case here
 - rather he thanks for money gift and chance to (re)introduce Epaphroditus and Timothy to them
 - can't resist the opportunity to give some warnings about division and against false teachers - but the sense is warm, advice, not of imminent danger
- Instead of simply addressing a pressing problem, Paul takes the opportunity to encourage and spur on his friends in Philippi to live [all out for Christ](#).
- As he does so, a picture emerges of God's Kingdom.
- It's that picture of God's Kingdom that I hope we will be exploring over the next few weeks:
 - taking the opportunity to work our way through the whole book of Philippians, getting a feel for the whole book (you might want to read the book for yourself, and the story of how the church started there in Acts 16);
 - highlighting those elements which most vividly paint in this picture of God's Kingdom.
- The picture that begins to emerge is of an **"UPSIDE DOWN KINGDOM"** - a kingdom where the values we would expect, which we are used to, are reversed.
- Its all upside down, back to front, the wrong way up!
- And the life of faith that Paul himself is living, and the one to which he is calling the Christians at Philippi to live too, is one characterised by upside down values.
- Its this dimension of the God's Kingdom that we'll keep coming back to over the next few weeks.

Life is Precious

- Life is precious.
- I don't think anyone here would disagree with that.
- It may not always be great, or pain-free, or successful - but life itself is precious.
- Evidence for that value in all sorts of things:
 - the joy that the safe arrival of a new baby brings;
 - the fear that grips the heart of any parent when something happens to their child;
 - the seriousness with which murder is dealt with by the judicial system - and the outrage when the public perception is that someone is getting off lightly;
 - the story-lines on so many of our drama series on TV (I'm a fan of ER - life and death all the time, not just in the rush of the Emergency Room (Casualty), but also the slower pain of story-lines about people suffering from AIDS and cancer.)
 - and of course the deep sadness, the grief and the emptiness that comes when someone dies;
- Life is precious.
- We only have one life, and we tend to be careful with it!!
 - we do try and avoid needless risks;
 - we are careful to attempt to make sure we are provided for in the future;
- We don't often throw caution to the winds in the way that we live - we are wary, careful, canny!

Paul's Core Values

- As Paul wrote to the church in Philippi, he was in prison.
- We don't know exactly where - scholars have put forward various possibilities, but no consensus has been reached.
- Facing trial - and a trial with an uncertain outcome that could literally cost him his life.
 - All of that is the background to vs.12-14
- His life is, literally, on the line.
- A precious life, the life of a gifted man, the life of a pioneer, the life of a strategic missionary breaking new ground.
- All possibly about to end, torn up by wild animals in the arena, or chopped short at the hands of a Roman executioner.
- Of all the possible things we could learn from this chapter in the book of Philippians, I really want us only to concentrate on the one.
- For Paul, life wasn't the most precious thing.
- For him, something else had come to take that central place.
- Someone, rather than something - Jesus Christ.
- For Paul, every aspect of his life had meaning solely in relation to Jesus Christ.
 - does this draw attention to Jesus?
 - does that help people to learn of Him?
 - does my being here reflect the way He would have lived?
 - am I reflecting his love and concern to those around me?
- There he is in prison, shackled, terrible conditions, in fear for his life - and he's glad!! (v.12)
 - Why? because the gospel has been spread to a place and to people who would otherwise have never heard - the troops in whatever prison/palace complex he was being held in!
 - He doesn't care whether people are taking advantage of his situation to build for themselves little empires out in the churches while he is locked up, as long as Jesus Christ is being preached.
- His deep desire is not that he should be freed, that he should escape with his life - and that would have been easy to arrange had he recanted on the gospel message he was preaching!
 - no, his deep desire was that he serve Jesus Christ faithfully.
 - v.20 "My deep desire and hope is that I shall never fail in my duty, but that at all times, and especially just now, I shall be full of courage, so that with my whole being I shall bring honour to Christ, whether I live or die."
- All his decisions are governed by bringing glory and honour to the name of Christ.
- As he sums it up in that famous verse:
 - "For what is life? To me, it is Christ. Death, then, will bring more." (v.21, GNB)
 - "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. (v.21, NIV)
- I could never understand that verse as a child - it was in some chorus that we used to sing in Sunday School, but I used to get the punctuation wrong!!!
 - ..."for me to live is Christ to die, is gain" - since Christ had died and I hadn't, at first glance made more sense - and I don't think I'd ever seen it written down other than in this song - thought maybe something about me only having spiritual life if Christ died (true enough, but not the point here!).
- Paul's thought is this:
 - if he lives, he will be serving Christ and working for His glory, strengthening the Philippians and other Christian churches, taking the gospel to those who haven't heard - and the glory will belong to Jesus Christ;
 - if he dies, on the other hand, he will die a martyr, faithful to the last - and in that way also bring glory to Jesus Christ.
 (Often partly mis-interpreted as simply being Paul's hope for heaven when he died - that element is there, but it is not the main thought. Paul much more interested in

Christ's glory than in his own rewards in heaven when he dies.)

Practical Implications of Dying to Live

- Its in light of that perspective that Paul writes the closing verses of this chapter (vs.27-30) - "for me to live is Christ, to die is (His) gain".
- The important thing for his hearers - and the important thing for us too - is that our "way of life should be as the gospel of Christ requires."
- Is the gospel our chief motivation?
- In the choices that we make day by day?
 - will I spend time with that person over lunch break today, or not? Demonstrate the love of Christ, speak of my hope in Christ...
 - will I look and see how I can help in the house when I get in from work, rather than slumping in front of the box?
 - will I squander an element of security, take God at His Word, and tithe each week or month?
 - will I seek again to learn of the Lord each day in prayer and Bible study?
- Those are just examples - but close to the promises most of us took as we joined the church.

Conclusion

- Life is precious - we dare not squander it.
- But we are members of a new Kingdom, God's Kingdom, an upside down Kingdom with upside down values.
- A Kingdom where the glory of Christ's name is much, much more precious than life itself.
 - where we are willing, eager to live all out for him, to say with Paul:
- **For me to live is Christ; for me to die is Christ!**
 - in all that I do alive, I seek to bring glory to Christ;
 - in all that people will see and remember of me as I die, I seek to bring glory to Christ!
- Is that our passion? Is that our vision? Is that our goal and our aim?
- That was the way Paul sought to live, and it was the way he dearly wanted his friends in Philippi to live too.
- Will we follow their example, and live all out for God?
- The words of Howard Guinness, whom God used to pioneer the student movements in Canada, Australia and New Zealand are an appropriate final challenge:
 - *"Where are the men and women of this generation who will hold their lives cheap, and be faithful even unto death... who will lose their lives for Christ's sake - flinging them away for love of Him? Where are those who will live dangerously, and be reckless in His service?... Where are the men of prayer? Where are the men who... count God's Word of more importance to them than their daily food? Where are the men who, like Moses of old, commune with God face to face as a man speaks with his friend?... Where are God's men and women in this day of God's power?"*