

Side by side for the Gospel

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[0 : 00] We'll continue to look at this passage in Philippians. So if you want to keep a thumb in that page, it's page 1178. We'll be looking through that passage together.

This morning, what we're thinking about is what it means to magnify something. What it means to magnify something. It's not a word that we often use, but we do know on one level what it means. Because we've all used the magnifying glass. One of my, I'm going to say, lesser moments as a child. I don't know if you ever did this.

It was when I saw some older boys using a magnifying glass to burn holes in the rubber soles of their shoes. And thought it would be a good idea to copy them when I got home.

Or when I went to my granny's house. I think I was only little. I did try it and nearly set my garden and my grandparents' garden bench on fire. So I didn't try that again.

[0 : 59] There's a bit more of a longer story, but I won't go into that now. The reason it's called a magnifying glass is because it magnifies. It's clearly in the title. It makes things bigger. It magnifies what you're looking at.

It magnifies the heat from the rays of the sun. It makes things greater. In this passage, we get an insight into what Paul wants his life to magnify. The Apostle Paul wants to be like a magnifying glass.

The Apostle Paul wants it to be that when people look at him, when they see his life, that Jesus is made bigger. That Jesus is magnified.

He wants Jesus to shine brighter and bigger because of his life. What we magnify, therefore, is ultimately connected to what is important to us.

The thing of most importance, the thing, as you're using the magnifying glass, the thing that you're looking at is at that moment the thing that you're thinking about. It's the thing that's most important.

[2 : 02] It's what we magnify the most. It's that when people, so actually, when people look at our lives, when the thing that we magnify actually is the thing that we make a priority.

It's our number one priority. The glory of Jesus Christ is Paul's number one priority, which is why he magnifies him and has an aim to magnify him. Over the past few weeks, as we've started this series in Philippians, joy is a big theme.

And what Paul gives, what makes Paul joyful, what he rejoices in. Over the last few weeks, we saw, first week, we saw Paul's joy in the church.

Because they have a gospel mindset, because they are in fellowship with Paul, that makes him joyful about them. We saw last week, Paul is joyful that people are hearing the good news of Jesus and that other people are telling one another about it.

But this week, Paul's joyful because of that he himself is being used to magnify Jesus, that he himself. We're going to look at that, three things.

[3 : 09] Firstly, more briefly, magnifying Jesus in being saved. And then magnifying Jesus in death and magnifying Jesus in life. So firstly, magnifying Jesus in being saved.

Paul has joy because he will be saved. Because he is saved and he will be saved. And because being saved magnifies Jesus. It makes Jesus look bigger. Look with me from the end of verse 18. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice. For I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.

To be delivered just means to escape from our current situation. To escape, to be saved. To be delivered from himself, from his sin, from evil and oppression.

From the world. And at that present moment, he doesn't know what that deliverance will look like. He doesn't know whether it means he'll be delivered from prison, to escape from prison.

[4 : 10] And keep on living for Jesus in this world. Or whether that deliverance actually means that he's going to die. And be delivered from the world. To be saved into heaven for all time.

Delivered into the arms of Jesus. But, the big thing is that it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. It does not matter to him. Verse 20.

I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed. But will have sufficient courage so that now, as always, Christ will be exalted in my body.

Whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ. And to die is gain. Whether Paul lives or dies, Christ will be exalted.

He will be magnified. But notice, it's not automatic. It will come through the prayers of God's people for him. And at God at work in his life.

[5 : 09] Essentially then, the rest of what we're going to be thinking about. Is what does it mean for Christ to be magnified? In our death. And in our life.

We'll only understand that if we know what Paul means when he says it. So the first is magnifying Jesus in death. I don't know if you remember that feeling when the final, maybe longer for some of us than it is for others.

That when you're at school. That feeling when the final school bell went for the Friday of the summer holidays at school. And you knew you had six weeks off. Or maybe even now when you finish work on a Friday, ready for two weeks in the sun.

And you get that warm, sort of fuzzy, joyful anticipation. Knowing that what awaits you is two weeks of time off from the daily grind. We've all had that feeling of desiring to be on holiday when we're working.

Even if you enjoy your job, we all look forward to the beach, hot weather, ice cream. Time to rest and relax. Take our mind off our normal worries. End of 23, look at what Paul says.

[6 : 21] Paul desires to be with Jesus because it will be his forever holiday with God.

It might seem a strange thing to say in our world that fears death and avoids talking about it at all costs. I'm not trying to romanticise it at all. Death's still awful and it's right in many ways to hate it. It's not the way things were meant to be. We just thought a little bit about that with the kids. But also, you might think, is Paul having a bit of a crisis?

Is he suicidal? He's not that either. And we'll look into why that's the case. The death of a follower of Jesus is different. For us who are here, left here, who've lost loved ones, we still miss them and long to see them again.

But we rest in the fact that if they were followers of Jesus, that the life they now live, eternal life, is a forever holiday with God. Which is better than the life they had here.

[7 : 28] The picture of heaven we have in the scriptures is one of complete bliss. I'm going to read some verses out and think about them. In Revelation 21, God says, They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God.

He will wipe up every tear from their eyes. There'll be no more death or mourning or crying or pain. For the old order of things has passed away. He was seated on the throne today, making everything new.

The sadness of death that we experience is never ever again experienced. Think this through. Just think this through. When you meet Jesus, you will never again see another person die.

Or know another person to die. You will never again feel the loss of a loved one. That pain and emotional heartache will never ever happen again. Tears of joy, perhaps.

But no tears of sadness. You will never ever mourn again. There's no pain. You won't experience pain, but you will never see anyone suffer. You will never see anyone riddled with pain in a hospital bed.

[8 : 36] You will never experience that for yourself. In Isaiah 11, we get another picture of heaven. You just listen to this. The wolf will live with the lamb.

Now, I don't know if you've ever seen on a nature documentary, a wolf and a lamb next to each other. They don't normally exist in the same area, do they?

A wolf and a lamb, it's either a chase or it's a bloody mess. Things that normally end in brutal conflict in our natural world, there's a picture of peaceful harmony.

It's a picture of the fact that peace will reign. No 24-hour news of distress, no anxiety about what will happen to the world. No tyrannical leaders or the brutality of war.

Peace will reign. There will be no bad news stories, just a good news story of the gospel. That order of brokenness and destruction and sorrow is actually what will die forever.

[9 : 41] That is the old order of the world that will forever pass away. No injustices, no fraud or theft or robbery, no abusive relationships or mistreating children.

Just peaceful existence. And neither will we sin. 2 Corinthians 15. In a moment, in the twinkling of a night, the last trump for the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised and we shall be changed.

You will never feel guilt or shame again because you've messed up. You will never mess up again. But you will be made perfect. You will never get that experience of rage or lash out with your tongue.

You won't have regret or you'll never have to ask again for forgiveness. Because you will be completely clean forever. It is a forever holiday with God.

And the best bit of hope is that Jesus Christ will be there with you in person. Face to face. The Jesus that we read about in the gospels that we would long to meet because of who he is and what he does for people right in front of him.

[10 : 51] Will be there speaking to you with the same compassion and love as which he speaks to people in the gospels. He will be there with you.

You will know his embrace like that of a brother. It is a forever holiday with God. That life that we look forward to.

That life awaits a follower of Jesus. It is only possible because of the good news of Jesus dying and rising to new life. And so in our death, in our death, in fact, it will actually magnify Jesus.

In the midst of the joy of heaven, Jesus is magnified. He is made bigger in heaven because of what he has done to you. Complete restoration only happens at your death.

You see why Paul desires it. Do you see why Paul desires it? It is a blessed existence. It is what awaits you if you do indeed follow him. And if you're here and you're still thinking through what it means to be a Christian, this is offered to you as well.

[12 : 00] It's yours to take hold of. But you must call on Jesus and want to have a relationship with him. Knowing that he died in your place to save you from yourself. And also save you for himself.

That's why Paul desires to be with Christ. However, he's not suicidal.

He's torn between the two. Paul knows that if he goes on living, it's no bad thing. Because he can magnify Jesus in his life. When it comes to living and dying, look, he says, verse 23, I'm torn between the two.

We talked about his death, but what does he say about living? Verse 22, if I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Verse 24, he spells out clearly what that fruitful labor will be.

It is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Verse 25, convinced of this, I know that I will remain and I will continue with all of you.

[13 : 06] Why? For your progress and joy in faith. If he carries on living, which he is convinced of, Paul will have great influence on the Philippian church.

They will progress. They will grow as people who will look more like Jesus and they will have greater joy because of Paul. One thing that Angus, my second one, is constantly talking about at the minute is solar panels.

Whenever we drive through and he sees solar panels on the top of houses or he sees solar panels in the fields, he notices them. And he's asked me numerous times if we can get some.

I asked him, I didn't know if he knew what they were or what I just said to him. I asked him why he wants them. His answer was brilliant. It's just so clear and so precise.

He said, so that we can turn the sun's energy into electricity for our house, which I wasn't expecting him to come out with. I don't know where he's learned with it, but I was pretty impressed.

[14 : 17] God, when we think of that illustration, that Angus knows why the sun is used to make electricity. God is like the sun. He's the power source. But he works through people.

He works through people to change them. Just like that solar panel is used to change the sun's energy into electricity.

He works through people so that they progress and have joy in him. Paul is like the solar panel that generates energy for the church.

He's used to magnify Jesus himself, but also magnify Jesus in the church, in people's hearts. With great joy as he does ministry with them. So that Jesus is exalted and bigger in the life of the church. If Paul's delivered from prison, it means, and doesn't die, it means that Jesus still has use for him whilst he's here. He still has good works planned for him to bless God's people.

[15 : 18] Jesus is magnified. He's made bigger as people grow in maturity. As they grow. But also Jesus is magnified as people turn to him for the very first time as he continues to do ministry in that area.

Trusting in his death in their place. God through Paul brings about that magnifying effect. To live is Christ. And to die is good.

In life or in death, he will magnify Jesus. The question we must ask, if we're not magnifying Jesus in our death yet, which we're all sat here, is how are we magnifying Jesus with our lives?

Some of you know I used to be a nurse down in London. And I remember having this thought. I worked in a ward called T9, which was infectious diseases, and they changed a little bit.

I did a bit of respiratory medicine. I remember having this thought. I'm a decent nurse, but I'm not the best. There's others that are much better than me. There are tons of nurses out there.

[16 : 25] Also, I'm on this ward in London doing this particular speciality. There are hundreds of hospitals. There are hundreds of wards I could work on. Why am I on this ward in this hospital?

Why has God placed me here? Because I could be working on any ward in any hospital across the whole of the UK. The same types of questions come to all of us when we think of what it means to follow with Jesus.

We can be asked of different things, circumstances that we find ourselves in our lives. Why has Jesus decided that you live on the street you do?

Why do you work in the job you do? Why do the kids go to the school or the nursery you've chosen? Because it's not by accident. It comes down to this.

If death is better by far, which Paul says it is. If it actually is better for every follower of Jesus to be there, then the logical question is, then why am I still here?

[17 : 36] Because why is he keeping me here? It must be that he has something for me to do. The answer must be, it must be connected to the same answer that it is for Paul.

It must be for the progress of God's people. It must be for the joy of faith in the people of God. Progress moving forward to a deeper, fuller experience of life in Christ Jesus.

Now of course, God has given us different personalities and gifts and abilities. We live in 21st century Scotland as opposed to 1st century Greece or Rome. And yet this is what it means to have our mind shaped by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

That our aim, like Paul's, with the circumstances of our lives that God has placed us in, is for the spiritual progress of those in our midst. For those in the church and those out of the church.

Which means that our words, our deeds and our actions must be that we are ambassadors for Jesus in all we do and say. That is a challenge for us, isn't it?

[18 : 41] To think that through. What it means for how we live and the priorities we make. If that is why we're here. And that is why he's placed you in the circumstances he has.

To live is Christ. To die is gain. Let's pray. Almighty God, we thank you for feeding us with your word.

And we thank you for that beautiful picture that we have in numerous places throughout the Bible. How amazing it will be to be with you for eternity. And we thank you that we know that it is better by far.

It's better by far. And sometimes we struggle to understand that. That being with you in your presence, the fullness of your presence will be better by far. But we're all here.

And so we ask you in response to what we think in this part of the Bible. We ask, what is it that you will have us doing here? And we ask that you'd help us to keep on refreshing our understanding of what that might mean for each of us as individuals.

[20 : 00] Where you have us live and work and do life. And so help us. Help us to be an encouragement to one another. For each other's progress and joy in the faith.

We long to be used by you that we might magnify Jesus in our life and in our day. That the church, that we might magnify Jesus ourselves. And that we might aim that others would magnify Jesus in their lives too.

That he would be made bigger and shine brighter. Because of the living God working in our hearts.
We ask for this in the name of Christ. Amen.