

# Jesus means life, joy, peace – everything

Message for Sunday, July 14, 2013  
by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** Philippians 1:18-26

**Children's Message:** From Romans 8:38-39

[I was covered from head to toe in protective clothing: hair net, safety goggles, face mask, white coveralls, latex gloves, and surgical booties. The photo shows what I looked like.]



Good morning. So nice to see—oh my goodness, you're not going to sit there are you? Do you know who sat there before you? There might be germs on that seat. Germs are everywhere, and they can kill you! Here is a picture of bacteria I made with my microscope. Do you want that on you? Yuck!

That's why I'm wearing protective clothing, so the germs can't get me. I don't want to die. I don't want to — Wait a minute... Alice, where is your protective suit?

Alice (oldest person in our congregation): I don't wear one.

Bruce: What! But how did you manage to live to be as old as you are? How do you fight germs? Oh I know: I'll bet you take lots and lots of pills, right?

Alice: No. The only thing I do for germs is wash my hands.

Bruce: That's it? But, but aren't you afraid that the germs will attack you and then... and then you'll die! I'm terrified of dying.

Alice: I'm not afraid to die. It's part of life.

Bruce: But when you die, you go into the ground, and you get covered with dirt... with *germs!*

Alice: I'm not afraid of dying. My body goes into the ground; but my soul continues to live with Jesus in my new home in heaven. The Bible says that nothing — not even death — can separate me from Jesus.

Bruce: Wow! If not even sickness and death can cut me off from Jesus, then I don't need to be afraid of dying. I don't need to be afraid of germs! (*Start removing the protective clothing.*)

Alice: But you still need to wash your hands.

**Sermon:** "Jesus means life, joy, peace – everything"

When I was talking with the children, you saw how afraid I was of dying. Compare that to Henry Venn, a leader in a Christian movement called "the Clapham sect." Together with William Wilberforce, they were instrumental in seeing slavery abolished throughout the British empire. When Henry's doctor told him that he was going to die in two weeks, that produced in him such joy and excitement that he lived an extra three months!

The apostle Paul had a similar view of dying. Let's dig into today's Scripture, and let his faith inspire us to trust Jesus in every part of our life, even death.

## 1) When I live with Jesus, nothing can devastate me

**Philippians 1:18-19, Today's English Version:**

**I will continue to be happy, because I know that by means of your prayers and the help which comes from the Spirit of Jesus Christ I shall be set free.**

Paul trusts Jesus, no matter what happens. By this time in his life, Paul has made three trips through Asia Minor and Greece. When he goes to a new town or city, he doesn't know anyone there; he has no place to stay. His method is always the same: he just tells the people about Jesus. Many reject the message, but some become followers of Jesus. Working with them, he establishes a church, and one of the people opens their home for Paul to live in while in that area. God always provides.

When I say “Many reject the message,” I don’t mean they simply walk away. Many times, the people who rejected the message of Jesus did so violently.

**2 Corinthians 11:24-25, Today’s English Version:**  
**Five times I was given the thirty-nine lashes by the Jews; three times I was whipped by the Romans; and once I was stoned.**

But did he stop telling people about Jesus? Never! So when Paul trusts Jesus, it is not the voice of naiveté, one who has never experienced trouble. This is someone whose faith has been tested severely, and he still knows that Jesus is everything to him.

## 2) When I live with Jesus, my priorities line up right

There was an interesting story years ago in the *Christian Science Monitor* about a young woman in New York who had been seeing a great deal of a young man. One day he called to say he had something special on his mind. He was coming to pick her up in his car, a memorable antique jalopy, and they would drive to the country for a picnic. They drove to Long Island. The young man seemed preoccupied. They drove along in silence. They then headed back to New York.

Back in the city, the young man broke his silence. He spoke solemnly of the great and significant event that was about to occur. Central Park, he said, would be the appropriate place for it to happen. They drove through the park on that beautiful spring day; the young woman’s expectations soared. And the young man announced that the great moment was at hand. He slowed the car down, headed for shady patch. “This is it,” he said; the climax had arrived. He slowed the car down to a stop, and then turned to face her. She was thrilled for what he was about to say to her.

He held her hand and pulled her toward himself. “Look at the odometer,” he said proudly. It’s all 9s, and in a moment it will roll over, with everything back to zero. This car has gone 100,000 miles!”

The young woman thought to herself, “You got that right: everything is back to zero.”

For that young man, his pride and joy was his car. What is your deepest desire? What would you like to have, something that would make you happy for the rest of your life? A lot of people pin their hopes on winning the big lottery: in July last year, when the Lotto Max prize was \$50 million, lottery retailers said they were selling tickets faster than they ever had before. A lot of people

would say, “My deepest desire is for my children to be happy, successful and live a good life.”

How you answer that question reveals a lot about you. It reveals your priorities. It even reveals your religion. Whatever it is that you desire the most, that is your god; that is what you worship; that is what you give your life to.

To those who don’t believe in God, who believe that life on earth is all there is, then it is natural for them to strive for the things which this world values: money, possessions, popularity, power, prestige, pleasure.

Here’s how Paul answered that question.

**Philippians 1:20, Today’s English Version:**

**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.**

Paul’s purpose for his life, the one thing that gave him energy to get up in the morning and keep him going all day long was to bring honour to Jesus Christ. In fact, that was more important than whether he lived or died.

## 3) When I live with Jesus, he is everything

**Philippians 1:21, Today’s English Version:**

**For what is life? To me, it is Christ.**

For Paul, knowing Jesus, loving Jesus, following Jesus — that’s what life was all about. He’s talking about having a relationship with the one who made you. God made you for a purpose. You’re not here by accident. God made you so that you and God could enjoy life together. When you discover that purpose and live that way, then life becomes full and meaningful. Paul did not say, “For me to live is religion” or church, Bible study, or ministry. No, he said the only thing worth living for is a relationship with the one who made me.

This is what William Barclay wrote about this verse:

**Jesus had been the *beginning* of Paul’s life, for on that day when he met Jesus, it was as if he had begun life all over again. Jesus had been the *continuing* of life; there had never been a day when Paul had not lived in his presence, and in the frightening moments Christ had been there to tell him not to be afraid. Christ was the *end* of life, for it was towards his eternal presence that life always led. Christ was the *inspiration* of life; he was the dynamic of life. To Paul, Christ had given the *task* of life, for it was**

he who had made him an apostle and sent him out as the evangelist of the Gentiles. To him, Christ had given the *strength* for life, for it was Christ's all-sufficient grace that was made perfect in Paul's weakness. For him, Christ was the *reward* of life, for to Paul the only worthwhile reward was closer fellowship with his Lord. If Christ were to be taken out of life, for Paul there would be nothing left.

Let me give you an example of what that looks like in daily life. When Jane and I were engaged, we made it clear very early in our relationship that our first and greatest love was for God. Our life commitment as followers of Jesus took priority over everything else, even over our relationship as husband and wife. The wonderful thing is that giving our lives to Jesus actually helps to nurture the love in a marriage, not diminish it. You see, if I put Jane on a pedestal and expect her to satisfy my deepest longings, then I would be expecting her to do something that only God can do, and that would ruin the marriage.

I'll say that again: in your marriage, if you expect your spouse to make you happy and satisfied with life, you are only setting up the both of you for disappointment and disaster. Only God can do that. That's why Paul said, "Life is Christ."

#### 4) When I live with Jesus, dying is gain

One of the privileges of being a pastor is that I get to lead funeral services. They are a wonderful opportunity to tell the difference that knowing Jesus makes in a person's life. The Christian view is that even though the body has failed, death itself is not a failure. Rather, death is a passage into the next life. This is exactly what we see in Paul's next words.

**Philippians 1:21-24, Today's English Version:**  
For what is life? To me, it is Christ. Death, then, will bring more. But if by continuing to live I can do more worthwhile work, then I am not sure which I should choose. I am pulled in two directions. I want very much to leave this life and be with Christ, which is a far better thing; but for your sake it is much more important that I remain alive.

Paul says, "Living with Jesus is wonderful. But dying will bring me closer to him, so that is even better!"

Having a positive view of death takes away all fear of dying. That doesn't make us suicidal, though. Rather, it gives us even greater power for living. Here's an example.

During the communist era in Romania, Christians there were severely persecuted: they were blacklisted from most jobs, their children denied a chance to go past high school, evicted from their home, there were beatings, imprisonment, and so on. Paul Negrut is a Romanian pastor and remembers that time.

**The strongest weapon that the world has is to sentence you to death. After they kill you, there is nothing else they can do to you. That was the lesson that I learned time and again from the secret police.**

**So whenever they told me, "We are going to kill you," I said, "I can hardly wait. That will be my greatest victory. Because then you will lose me forever, and I will be forever home."**

When you're not afraid of dying, you can live life to the full.

So Paul eagerly looks forward to dying. But then he says, "However, I am not here to satisfy my own desires, but to do God's work. And right now, that means working with you." So Paul continued his ministry of telling others about Jesus, even while a prisoner in chains.

#### 5) Jesus is life

I am a follower of Jesus. Let me tell you why. First of all, it is not so that I will escape from hell. When I hear a preacher telling people to "turn or burn," I turn all right: it turns me right off. That's not why I follow Jesus.

Also, it's not because I grew up in church. Even though my parents did bring me up as part of a church, doing something just because "It's what my parents did" has never been a good enough reason for me. In fact, when we had confirmation class in grade eleven, I was the only one of the group who did not go through with it.

Rather, I accept Jesus as my Saviour, and I proclaim him as my Lord, simply because Jesus is life. He is my joy, my hope, my peace, my strength, my goal, my desire. I wholeheartedly agree with Paul, "Life is Christ."

#### Next Steps:

- What is your deepest desire? What does that tell you about yourself?
- What are you living for? Where does Jesus fit in that picture?
- Are you ready to die? Even excited about it?
- For all these questions: Are you happy with your answers? If not, what would you like to change?

How do you see yourself a year from now? What steps will you take to get there?