

# THE LEAGUE OF FAR-FROM-EXTRAORDINARY GENTLEMEN

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## A STUDY OF THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

### WEEK 10 – To Caesar You Shall Go! – Acts 24-26

- **Paul's fate was sealed**

*<sup>30</sup> Then the king, the governor, Bernice, and all the others stood and left. <sup>31</sup> As they went out, they talked it over and agreed, "This man hasn't done anything to deserve death or imprisonment."*

*<sup>32</sup> And Agrippa said to Festus, "He could have been set free if he hadn't appealed to Caesar."  
– Acts 24:30-32 NLT*

- Was Agrippa right?
- Had Paul made a glaring mistake?
- Paul had made an appeal to go to Rome and appear before Caesar

*<sup>9</sup> Then Festus, wanting to please the Jews, asked him, "Are you willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there?"*

*<sup>10</sup> But Paul replied, "No! This is the official Roman court, so I ought to be tried right here. You know very well I am not guilty of harming the Jews. <sup>11</sup> If I have done something worthy of death, I don't refuse to die. But if I am innocent, no one has a right to turn me over to these men to kill me. **I appeal to Caesar!**" – Acts 25:9-11 NLT*

- Paul knew he wouldn't get a fair trial in Jerusalem
- He knew there was still a plot against his life
- So, he used his rights as a Roman citizen to appeal for hearing before Caesar
- What's going on here is much bigger than Paul
  - Romans rulers vs the rule of Christ
  - Caesar vs God
  - Kingdoms of earth vs the Kingdom of Heaven
  - Human authority vs God's sovereignty

#### **Antonius Felix**

- A Greek freedman of the mother of emperor Claudius
- He and his brother, Pallas, had become childhood companions of Claudius
- He was eventually appointed governor of Judea by Claudius
- He had been recommended by the Jewish high priest, Jonathan

- He was known for his greed, immorality and corruption
- Under his rule, crime and corruption were rampant in Judea

### **Herod Agrippa II**

- He was also an Edomite, raised in the imperial court in Rome
- He was the great-grandson of Herod the Great
- He was the Roman-appointed king of Judea
- He had direct supervision of the temple in Jerusalem and power to appoint the high priest
- His sister, Drusilla, was married to Felix
- His wife, Bernice, was actually his sister, with whom he had an incestuous relationship

### **Caesar**

- Claudius became emperor after the assassination of Caligula
- He was disfigured, awkward and clumsy
- In youth, he was shunned from public life and found most of his friends among the freedman and foreigners of his household

- **Paul's hearing before Felix**

<sup>31</sup> So that night, as ordered, the soldiers took Paul as far as Antipatris. <sup>32</sup> They returned to the fortress the next morning, while the mounted troops took him on to Caesarea. <sup>33</sup> When they arrived in Caesarea, they presented Paul and the letter to Governor Felix. <sup>34</sup> He read it and then asked Paul what province he was from. "Cilicia," Paul answered.

<sup>35</sup> "I will hear your case myself when your accusers arrive," the governor told him. Then the governor ordered him kept in the prison at Herod's headquarters. – Acts 23:31-35 NLT

- The prosecution

Five days later Ananias, the high priest, arrived with some of the Jewish elders and the lawyer Tertullus, to present their case against Paul to the governor. <sup>2</sup> When Paul was called in, Tertullus presented the charges against Paul in the following address to the governor: – Acts 24:1-2 NLT

### **Tertullus**

- This guy was a paid professional
- He was a prosecuting attorney
- He presented the Sanhedrin's case against Paul
- It was the same old fabrications and falsehoods

- Paul's defense and confession

<sup>14</sup> "But I admit that I follow the Way, which they call a cult. I worship the God of our ancestors, and I firmly believe the Jewish law and everything written in the prophets. <sup>15</sup> I have the same hope in God that these men have, that **he will raise both the righteous and the unrighteous.** <sup>16</sup> Because of this, I always try to maintain a clear conscience before God and all people. – Acts 24:14-16 NLT

- Paul's hope is in the resurrection of the dead
- That was his real crime

- But he had been accused of being a troublemaker
- He was labeled as an inciter of riots all over the world
- He was declared to be a ringleader in a dangerous cult
- And it was claimed that he had desecrated the Temple

○ Paul's declaration of innocence

<sup>10</sup> *The governor then motioned for Paul to speak. Paul said, "I know, sir, that you have been a judge of Jewish affairs for many years, so I gladly present my defense before you.*

<sup>11</sup> *You can quickly discover that I arrived in Jerusalem no more than twelve days ago to worship at the Temple. <sup>12</sup> My accusers never found me arguing with anyone in the Temple, nor stirring up a riot in any synagogue or on the streets of the city. <sup>13</sup> **These men cannot prove the things they accuse me of doing.***

<sup>14</sup> *"But I admit that I follow the Way, which they call a cult. I worship the God of our ancestors, and I firmly believe the Jewish law and everything written in the prophets. <sup>15</sup> I have the same hope in God that these men have, that he will raise both the righteous and the unrighteous. – Acts 24:10-13 NLT*

- Paul confessed to following the Way
- He admitted to being a worshipper of Yahweh
- He expressed his firm belief in the Mosaic law and the teachings of the prophets
- He claimed to believe the same things the Sanhedrin did
- Including belief in the resurrection of the dead
- This was a well-orchestrated ploy on Paul's part

<sup>6</sup> *Paul realized that some members of the high council were Sadducees and some were Pharisees, so he shouted, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, as were my ancestors! **And I am on trial because my hope is in the resurrection of the dead!"***

<sup>7</sup> *This divided the council—the Pharisees against the Sadducees... – Acts 23:6-7 NLT*

○ Paul's real crime

<sup>20</sup> *Ask these men here what crime the Jewish high council found me guilty of, <sup>21</sup> except for the one time I shouted out, '**I am on trial before you today because I believe in the resurrection of the dead!**'" – Acts 24:20 NLT*

• Sin, righteousness and judgment

<sup>24</sup> *A few days later Felix came back with his wife, Drusilla, who was Jewish. Sending for Paul, they listened as **he told them about faith in Christ Jesus.** <sup>25</sup> **As he reasoned with them about righteousness and self-control and the coming day of judgment, Felix became frightened.***

– Acts 24:24-25 NLT

○ Paul mentions three things that frighten Felix

- Righteousness
- Self-control

- The coming day of judgment
- These three things should remind us of something Jesus had said

<sup>8</sup> *And when he comes, he will convict the world of its **sin**, and of God's **righteousness**, and of **the coming judgment**.* <sup>9</sup> *The world's sin is that it refuses to believe in me.*

<sup>10</sup> *Righteousness is available because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more.*

<sup>11</sup> *Judgment will come because the ruler of this world has already been judged.* – John 16:8-11 NLT

- Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit will convict the world...
  1. ...of its sin
  2. ...of God's righteousness
  3. ...of the coming judgment

*...he will **prove the world wrong** concerning sin and righteousness and judgment... – NLT*

Each of us has a personal perspective on what is right and what is wrong. We may not call it sin, but we inherently know that there are some things that are off limits and unacceptable in terms of behavior. For the most part, all men live with a mindset that if you sin (do what is wrong), there will be consequences. If you do what is righteous (or good and acceptable), you will be rewarded. Thus, the judgment. Wired into mankind is the God-created sense of right and wrong, with the accompanying ideas of merit and punishment. – Ken Miller, [www.vesselsofclay.org](http://www.vesselsofclay.org)

- Felix is replaced by Festus

<sup>27</sup> *After two years went by in this way, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And because Felix wanted to gain favor with the Jewish people, he left Paul in prison.* – Acts 24:27 NLT

### **Porcius Festus**

- The emperor Nero replaced Felix with Festus
- He was a career diplomat

<sup>6</sup> *About eight or ten days later Festus returned to Caesarea, and on the following day he took his seat in court and ordered that Paul be brought in.* <sup>7</sup> *When Paul arrived, the Jewish leaders from Jerusalem gathered around and made many serious accusations they couldn't prove.*

<sup>8</sup> *Paul denied the charges. "I am not guilty of any crime against the Jewish laws or the Temple or the Roman government," he said.*

<sup>9</sup> *Then Festus, wanting to please the Jews, asked him, "Are you willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there?"*

*<sup>10</sup> But Paul replied, “No! This is the official Roman court, so I ought to be tried right here. You know very well I am not guilty of harming the Jews. <sup>11</sup> If I have done something worthy of death, I don’t refuse to die. But if I am innocent, no one has a right to turn me over to these men to kill me. I appeal to Caesar!” – Acts 25:6-11 NLT*

- **Paul before Agrippa**

- Paul ends up getting a hearing before Agrippa
- He returns to his message regarding the hope of Israel

*Then Agrippa said to Paul, “You may speak in your defense.”*

*<sup>1</sup> So Paul, gesturing with his hand, started his defense: <sup>2</sup> “I am fortunate, King Agrippa, that you are the one hearing my defense today against all these accusations made by the Jewish leaders, <sup>3</sup> for I know you are an expert on all Jewish customs and controversies. Now please listen to me patiently!*

*<sup>4</sup> “As the Jewish leaders are well aware, I was given a thorough Jewish training from my earliest childhood among my own people and in Jerusalem. <sup>5</sup> If they would admit it, they know that I have been a member of the Pharisees, the strictest sect of our religion. <sup>6</sup> **Now I am on trial because of my hope in the fulfillment of God’s promise made to our ancestors.** <sup>7</sup> In fact, that is why the twelve tribes of Israel zealously worship God night and day, and **they share the same hope I have.** Yet, Your Majesty, **they accuse me for having this hope!**” – Acts 26:1-7 NLT*

- It was his belief in the resurrection of the body that gave Paul hope
- Because it was the resurrection of Jesus that made Him the Savior and Messiah
- It is because Jesus was raised from the dead that we have hope

*<sup>21</sup> Some Jews arrested me in the Temple for preaching this, and they tried to kill me. <sup>22</sup> But God has protected me right up to this present time so I can testify to everyone, from the least to the greatest. I teach nothing except what the prophets and Moses said would happen— <sup>23</sup> that **the Messiah would suffer and be the first to rise from the dead, and in this way announce God’s light to Jews and Gentiles alike.**”*

*<sup>24</sup> Suddenly, Festus shouted, “Paul, you are insane. Too much study has made you crazy!” – Acts 26:21-24 NLT*

- Festus thought Paul was crazy
- Agrippa thought Paul was trying to convert him

*<sup>28</sup> Agrippa interrupted him. “Do you think you can persuade me to become a Christian so quickly?”*

*<sup>29</sup> Paul replied, “Whether quickly or not, I pray to God that both you and everyone here in this audience might become the same as I am, except for these chains.” – Acts 26:28-29 NLT*

- **Become as I am**

- Paul's greatest desire was the Agrippa and Festus know what he knew
- He wanted them to experience the joy of forgiveness from sin and freedom found in Christ

Paul was the one in chains, but he was **free**

*...if the Son sets you free, you are truly free...* – John 8:36 NLT

Agrippa and Festus were free, but were actually **slaves**

*...you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey...* – Romans 6:16 NLT

These two men were **captives** to sin and death

*And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has **freed you from the power of sin that leads to death.*** – Romans 8:2 NLT

*But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.* – Romans 6:22 ESV



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# HOMEWORK

WEEK 11: WHEN IN ROME. – Acts 27-28

These are the final two chapters of the book of Acts, so read them carefully, and take note of any verses, words or phrases that jump out at you. Consider what events or circumstances are significant in these chapters. Use the space below to record your thoughts:

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Read Romans 1:8-12. What wish does Paul express in this passage? \_\_\_\_\_

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Now read Acts 27:11-16. Paul finally gets his wish. But in glancing back over chapters 27-28, what did it take for Paul to get there? \_\_\_\_\_

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Why do you think it was so important to Paul that he make it to Rome? What do you think he hoped to accomplish there? \_\_\_\_\_

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While a prisoner in Rome, Paul would end up writing four of his letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. What does this fact reveal about the sovereignty of God? \_\_\_\_\_

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Read the following passages from those letters, then write out beside them what they reveal about Paul's view of God's sovereignty and his own imprisonment.

Ephesians 1:3-14: \_\_\_\_\_

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Philippians 1:12-14: \_\_\_\_\_

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Colossians 4:2-6: \_\_\_\_\_

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Philemon 1:8-16: \_\_\_\_\_

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Now read the closing lines of Luke's book: Acts 28:30-31. What does Luke reveal about Paul and his commitment to the gospel? \_\_\_\_\_

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Finally, read Philippians 1:20-26. What can you learn from Paul's approach to life and ministry, and how can you apply it to your own life? \_\_\_\_\_

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Take some time to read the attached article by Matt Slick called, "The Sovereignty of God."

# To Live Is Christ, To Die Is Gain.

By Justin Buzzard

I don't like it when people take Bible verses out of context and slap them on coffee mugs, put them on bookmarks, put them on bumper stickers. Philippians is the book of the Bible that has the most "life motto" verses that get taken out of context. Think about all the verses that come from Philippians: "Do not be anxious about anything," "Rejoice in the Lord always," "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling," "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," "To live is Christ, to die is gain." Philippians is full of these verses. We're actually going to memorize one of these verses today, because it's in our passage. So, you can go home and tell your friends, "I memorized a Bible verse in church today." Philippians 1:21 says, "To live is Christ, and to die is gain." I'm going to say this twice, and you're going to say it with me. Repeat after me: "To live is Christ, and to die is gain." "To live is Christ, and to die is gain."

Most people hear that verse or see it on a coffee mug and think, *That's a great life motto, I'm going to live by that.* But we need to hear the context in which this was first spoken. The Apostle Paul is in prison in the city of Rome, facing trial, knowing he's going to be executed for his faith in Christ. So, he writes a letter to the church in Philippi, and tells them, "This is what I believe: to live is Christ and to die is gain." This is a man facing execution. We've got to wrap our heads around what he's saying.

Nero was the emperor of Rome at this time. Paul would have to stand before Nero and give his defense for why he came under charges. Tacitus was a historian in first century Rome. He says this about Nero, the guy the Apostle Paul would be facing:

Besides being put to death, the Christians were made to serve as objects of amusement. They were clothed in the hides of beasts and torn to death by dogs. Others were crucified. Others were set on fire to serve to illuminate the night when daylight failed. Nero had thrown open his grounds for the display and was putting on a show and a circus where he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer and drove about in his chariot. All this gave rise to a feeling of pity, for it was felt that they—the Christians—were being destroyed not for the public good but to gratify the cruelty of an individual.

This is what's going on in Rome when Paul wrote, "To live is Christ, and to die is gain." There is an emperor who is torturing Christians to satisfy his own wicked desires. This is the guy that Paul is going up against.

Every religion has to answer two questions: What is life? and, what is death? Religions answer those two questions very differently. Buddhism says, "To live is to achieve good Karma, and to die is to hope for a better reincarnation." Islam teaches, "To live is to obey Allah, and if your good deeds outweigh your bad deeds, death is to achieve a personal paradise." Silicon Valley answers that question this way: "To live is self, and to die is loss." That's what the average

person in Silicon Valley believes. Life is all about the self. And to die is to lose everything. That's very different from what the Apostle Paul says.

Let's look at this whole passage: Philippians 1:18–30. What Paul says here does battle with what Silicon Valley religion says. Paul says this:

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. 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. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

Remember, Paul is in prison in Rome, and he's writing to this church he loves in Philippi. And he says, "I don't know how this is going to turn out. I'm in prison. My trial is coming up.

I don't know if I will be found guilty and executed. But if I die, I count it as gain because I get to be with Jesus, and I really want that. Or maybe they'll release me instead. If they release me, that's great, too. Because I get to be with you. I'll come to Philippi, I'll see you, I'll encourage you. But no matter what happens, I want you to continue moving forward in the faith, advancing the gospel."

### **Life: self or Christ?**

As we look at this passage, we're going to learn about life, about death, and about the battle that we're called to fight. Silicon Valley teaches that to live is self, as though life is a solar system and what we do in Silicon Valley is at the center. We want everything to revolve around us, our dreams, our hopes, our ambitions, our plans. G.K. Chesterton told a parable about a boy who was given the magical opportunity to become small or big. Predictably, the boy chose to be made gigantic. And in a matter of three minutes, he could stride across North America. He could go up to Mount Everest and kick it over like a sand castle. But after a few days of this he got bored because the whole earth felt as big as his back yard. There was no one to play with and nothing to do. Had that boy instead chosen to be made small, his back yard could have

been like the Amazon rain forest. He could have spent his whole life exploring just his back yard, just his neighborhood.

We like to make ourselves big. We place ourselves at the center of the solar system. But I really want to get smaller as I get older, not bigger. I want God to be bigger so I can get lost in who he is. There is a lot of superficial Christianity in Silicon Valley—around the world too, but especially here. This is because Jesus is merely added to our lives. We stay at the center of the universe, and we ask Jesus to orbit around us. We say, “I like Jesus; he’s great. I want some Jesus, I want some Christianity, I want some church. But I’m going to stay at the center of my life. Jesus, you orbit around me. I’ll see you every time you come around.”

That’s not what Jesus wants from us though. Jesus comes into our life, and he mettles with us. He tells us to die to ourselves. He becomes the new center of our lives. The issue of the whole Bible and the issue of our whole life is idolatry. Idolatry is putting anything other than God at the center of your life, at the center of your solar system.

Darrin Patrick says, “An idol is anything that gets more glory, more weight, more importance in our eyes than God does.” What was the first commandment God gave to his people? “You shall have no other gods before me.” If you break the first commandment, you break all the other commandments. The first commandment is to not have anything other than God at the center of your life. Humans were made to worship. The issue isn’t if we going to worship; it’s what we’re going to worship, who we’re going to worship. Everyone in Silicon Valley worships. But what do we worship, who do we worship as a god? All sin comes from valuing something more than God, placing something other than God at the center of our lives.

What are your idols? We don’t want Jesus to be an add-on. We don’t want to have our life, our way, with a little Jesus on top. What drives you? Here are seven questions to help you discover your idols. Write these questions down.

- *What do I worry about most?*
- *If I failed at it or lost it, what would cause me to not even want to live?*
- *What do I use to comfort myself when things go badly or when things are difficult?*
- *What preoccupies me? What do I daydream about? Where do I fixate my thoughts?*
- *What makes me feel worthy? What is the first thing I want people to know about me?*
- *What unanswered prayer would make me think about turning away from God?*
- *What do I expect out of life? What would make me happy?*

Think about those questions. Don’t try to figure it all out now, but it’s important to know what drives your life.

I think there are four major idols in Silicon Valley, four major groups that our self-worship can fall under. These idols are really about the self.

### **Comfort**

The first idol is comfort. That means you really like privacy, lack of stress, freedom. You worship comfort. Your greatest nightmares are stress and demands. Others can feel hurt by you because you chase comfort so much that you back away from difficult situations.

### **Approval**

A second idol that a lot of us have is approval. You love affirmation. You want love, you want relationship. Your greatest nightmare is rejection, because you can't handle the thought of being discarded by somebody. Others may feel mothered by you, but a problem in your life is cowardice. Like those who idolize comfort, you back away from difficult situations.

### **Control**

A third idol is control. This is my idol. You really like self-discipline, certainty, and standards. Your greatest nightmare is uncertainty. You can't handle uncertainty. You do a lot of worrying.

### **Power**

A fourth idol is power. You want success, you want to win, you want to influence. Your greatest nightmare is humiliation. You can't handle humiliation. Others often feel used by you. Your problem emotion is anger.

Notice what Paul didn't say in that prison cell. He didn't say, "To live is self," in that prison cell. He didn't say, "To live is comfort." He didn't say, "To live is approval," "To live is control," "To live is power." He said, "To live is Christ," because he knew that Christ is greater than these idols we bow down to and build our lives upon. Christ is greater than comfort. He knows everything about you. He can comfort you better than anything else. Go to Christ for comfort.

Do you want approval? Christ died for you when you were at your worst, when there was nothing about you to commend yourself to God or other people. You can find all the approval you could ever want in Christ. What about control? Christ holds the whole universe in his hands. Only in him can you find relief from the things you are afraid of. Only then can you let go of control. And what about power? Christ will never leave you humiliated. He is faithful, and you can cling to him. It's slavery if we cling to the Silicon Valley way: "To live is self; to live is to pursue these idols; to live is to bow down to comfort, approval, control, power." That's making yourself gigantic when your eyes are meant to be on God.

### **Death: loss or gain?**

We have to face the reality that everybody in this room—let this sink in—will die. Everyone in our city will take a last breath. We can forget that. We're a young church, but we have three weddings coming up, and I don't know where we're going to do them. But what about when someone dies; where are we going to do that? People in this church will die. Death comes. We have to wrestle with what the Apostle Paul says.

Silicon Valley says, "To live is self, and to die is loss." If you die, you lose something. That makes sense because how you define life controls how you define death. How you define life will set

the tone for how you think about death. If life is all about comfort, you're not going to like death because death isn't comfortable. If life is all about control, you're not going to like death because you don't know when it's going to strike.

But Paul says this: "Death is gain." Things get better. You get more of what you want. I invest in things I like because I want to get a good return. In verse 23 Paul says, "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far." So if you define life through Christ, then death is gain. When you die you get more of Christ.

So the message of Silicon Valley—to live is self, and to die is loss—will kill you. People that live by this message will be killed by it, because the essence of all sin is to live life for yourself rather than to live for God and for other people. Jesus summed up the Old Testament with two commandments: Love God and love your neighbors. Sin is a distortion of those two callings, and the Scriptures threaten horrible things for all who will not heed that message. The Scriptures are clear, there is eternal death for those of us who want to live based on this message—To live is self, and to die is loss.

But Paul's message, this verse that gets slapped on coffee mugs and bumper stickers, will set you free—To live is Christ, and to die is gain. That message begins with the fact that Christ came to die for your selfishness. We're all selfish, in different ways. Jesus came to forgive our sin. He came to rescue us. Jesus comes to set us free from slavery and the false gods that you've been worshipping. He resets the solar system; he places himself in the center. He says, "No, I want to set you free. I want to make you small. I'm going to be at the center of your life, and you're going to orbit around me. You're going to love it, because I am God and I am great, and I created you for my glory." That's a beautiful thing.

That's why a Christian is invincible. Even if you kill me, I'm not defeated. I get to be with Jesus. My death isn't the last you're going to see of me, because I'm going to live forever in the presence of Jesus, worshipping him. That's freedom. Paul truly believed this. No matter what happened to Paul, he experienced more freedom. Do you want to throw me in prison? Do you want to beat me? Do you want to take away my money? Do you want to take my life? I don't care. I'm free because to live is Christ. My life isn't based upon money, it's not based upon freedom to do whatever I want. It's based on Jesus Christ, and he's never going to fail me. I'm always with him.

I think these were the words in Paul's head when, as legend has it, Paul came outside the gates of Rome, got down on his knees, bared his neck, and was beheaded for his faith in Christ: *To live is Christ, and to die is gain*. I believe he faced that moment with fear, because we're all afraid of a big knife. But I also believe he faced that moment predominantly with joy. He believed this, it was in his guts. It wasn't just in his Bible, it wasn't just on the coffee mug he had with him in prison. It was on his heart. So he faced death with joy. He knew he had been saved from hell. He knew he had been saved from the wrath of God that is on all of us who will not bow our knee to Jesus Christ. I bet a lot of his thoughts were with the church in Philippi and the other churches he started. And his mind was probably on the soldiers about to kill him,

thinking, *I want them to know Jesus. I want them to be free like I'm free. I want them to face their final hour like I'm facing mine.*

### **Join the battle**

Paul makes it clear in the rest of this passage that we have a battle to fight. He has told us what life is about, he has told us what death is about, and he tells us there is a battle that we have to fight when we live here on earth. In verse 27 he says, "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ so that whether I come and see you or I am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel." The word for "striving" is an army word. It comes from the Roman military. Roman soldiers fought side by side. They didn't fight independently. How many of you have seen the movie "Gladiator?" Men, if you haven't seen it, go see "Gladiator" tonight. In a famous scene, men are forced to fight in the arena for the first time, and they suddenly have to fight together. They band together, they put their shields together, and they fight as this unit, as a group. That's how the Romans fought. It made them a successful army, because they knew how to fight together, united. They based their battle tactics on that. Paul says to these believers in Philippi that Christians are called to fight, to strive together. Christianity is a team sport, and it calls for a fight.

We often talk about how the church is a family, and it is. In this place you find family. But we forget that the church is also an army. Scripture is full of army metaphors when talking about the church. It's a group of people who are fighting a battle together, who are on a mission together. What Paul says in verse 27 is striking. He says, "To live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel, you have to fight. You're going to strive side by side together in this fight." Why? Because we're called to live for Christ in a place that's hostile to him. The city of Philippi was not an easy place to be a believer. Neither is Silicon Valley. We're called to live for Christ in an environment, in a city, in a culture that's hostile to Jesus.

Christ—not in the same way as Philippi or Rome 2,000 years ago. No one is threatening our execution, though our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world are facing that. But it's still a difficult place to live for Christ.

Men in our society need a lot of help, but even the man who is most far gone—the most lost in irresponsibility or video games or addiction—still feels this deep in his guts. Every man wants to be in a fight, wants to be on a mission where everything is at stake. I've got three little boys, and they've got that in them. They want to fight. Every man wants to be in some sort of battle. Vince Lombardi, the football coach, famously said, "I firmly believe that any man's finest hour, the greatest fulfillment of all that he holds dear, is that moment when he has worked his heart out in a good cause and lies exhausted on the field of battle, victorious."

The problem in our day and age is that there aren't any more causes. No man is wrestling with something he is willing to die for. Most men are living for themselves. They're lost. Studies have been done on men coming back from combat, and when they come back and enter the work force or enter the church, they struggle with feeling like their life doesn't have a clear mission

anymore. It was clear out there, it was life and death, everything was at stake, there were bullets flying. They were fighting for freedom. Then they come back, and they're asked to be an usher in the church, to pass out bulletins, and it doesn't feel the same.

Men, the most exciting battle that you can give your life to—and this is for women, too, but I believe men set the tone for a community and for a city—is to follow Jesus Christ. That's the most exciting, thrilling, noble battle you can give your life to because everything is at stake: life, death, eternity. You can give your life to this, like Paul did. In verse 27 Paul says, "Live lives that are worthy of the gospel of Christ." Our translations don't get across what's fully said there in Greek. We must live as citizens worthy of the gospel of Christ. Paul is playing upon the dual citizenship that the Philippians have.

Philippi was an unoccupied Roman colony. If you lived in the city of Philippi, you had Roman citizenship. And the people in the city of Philippi were proud of that citizenship. They loved being known as Roman citizens. It gave them all kinds of freedom. This was a city that was full of men and soldiers. Roman soldiers would go to Philippi to retire. They were granted free land there. So Paul is writing to a city full of men, full of soldiers looking for direction, and he reminds them, "Your true citizenship, is not your Roman citizenship, it's your heavenly citizenship. Jesus has saved you. I'm calling you to fight, but not like Roman soldiers. You're not to go out with your swords and shields and kill people. I'm calling you to fight like Christ, like heavenly soldiers."

How did God fight? He loved people to death. Jesus Christ left heaven, was born as a man, lived a sinless life on our behalf, went to the cross, died for our sins, and rose again victorious. That's how we are called to fight in Silicon Valley. We are supposed to love people to death, because we have a message of life. Jesus Christ went to hell and back for

you. He came and suffered it all for you, so that you would be forgiven and your life would be fundamentally changed.

## **Conclusion**

We memorized this verse when we started, but we didn't memorize the whole thing. Philippians 1:21 says, "To live is Christ and to die is gain." But there are three words that come before that. Paul first says, "*For to me* to live is Christ and to die is gain" (emphasis mine). It's a personal conviction for him. This isn't scribbled on his coffee cup. This isn't a verse he heard about in church. It's his personal conviction—a truth that drives his life. I'm praying for a miracle right now: men who have not made this the driving force of your lives, I want this to become true for you. I want this to drive your lives. All of you here, but especially the men, this passage is a call to quit living for yourselves. A lot of you have already answered that call. This is a call to quit living for yourself the way Silicon Valley likes to live, the way the human heart likes to live, apart from the grace of God. This is a call to turn to Christ and ask him to come into your life and transform you. This is a call to join a mission, to join an army, to love people to death in this city.

Every man in this room—if for the first time in your life you want to say, “I want this to be true. I want to leave my sinful, selfish life behind. I want to know the grace of Christ and join this mission,” or if you want to make a fresh commitment as a man of God and as a man that is at this church, and you want to set the tone—get on our knees right now and pray. My jeans are kind of tight, that was hard, but I’m on my knees, too. Let’s make this commitment; let’s pray. And women, please pray for the men.

God, the men of this church are on their knees, saying that this is your church, saying that you are the one building this church. We are here to repent of our selfishness. We are here to repent of the ways that we have built our life around ourselves instead of Jesus Christ. We thank you for the grace that is available to us in Jesus. We thank you that he has come and rescued us from our selfishness, that he’s forgiven us. He has come to be the center of the solar system of our lives. We pray that Philippians 1:21 could be deep in our bones. We pray that just like our friend the Apostle Paul we could say, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

*Holy Spirit, I pray that you will fill us afresh with your power to live for Jesus Christ, to lay down our lives in this city for our wives, for our kids, for our friends, and for those who don’t know you. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.*