

Sunday, Oct 11, 2020 at 9:30 AM

Broadcasting from Ballantyne Campus – Charlotte, NC USA

Elevation – eFam – All sites participating on-line due to COVID-19 Pandemic

Pastor: Steven Furtick

Sermon Title: "RUNCtrl? Are you In Control? The power of a better question The Three Best Question that you can ask: What does it matter? What does it mean? What shall I choose?"

Scripture for this week:

- **Ep 4: 4-6:** "4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all."
- **Phil 1: 12 to 25:** 12 Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, 13 so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, 14 and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear. 15 Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; 16 the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; 17 the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. 18 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice, 19 for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, 20 according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. 23 But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; 24 yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again.
- **Ex 4:1 - 2:** Then Moses said, "What if they will not believe me or listen to what I say? For they may say, 'The Lord has not appeared to you.'" 2 The Lord said to him, "What is that in your hand?" And he said, "A staff."
- **1 Kings 19:** 9 He came to a cave and camped there, and the word of the Lord came to him, and He said to him, "Why are you here, Elijah?" 10 And he said, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, Lord of Hosts, for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, thrown down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword, and I alone am left, and they seek to take my life."

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- Please consider joining an eGroup (small group) so you don't have to walk this walk alone? – See [www.elevationchurch.cc](http://www.elevationchurch.cc).
- Interested in leading an eGroup? See: [www.elevationchurch.cc](http://www.elevationchurch.cc).

- New Bible Study for some eGroups – “The Art of Contentment” – A study of Philippians.
- Opening comments #1: Let me teach you how to fight a spiritual fight today – how many believe that God deserves the glory for the victories in your life? And this is pretty standard stuff that we talk about all the time – here’s the other important question: If God wants to glory why not give him the battles as well? Have you ever thought about that? Lord we can we declare that this is too big for us and we want to give you the battle back. Give him a shout of praise. God is great and greatly to be praised.
- Opening comments #2: In the presence of the Lord we are fulfilled massive joy – how many believe that today? And His presence is wherever you are – give God praise that you are glad that you made it – praise him as if the only way you made it was due to His grace. The level of your praise tells me a lot about your perspective with God. Give him a great praise today.
- I am pleased to announce that that many of our physical locations are now meeting for the first time in seven months for a 9:30 AM Sunday worship time – with the appropriate safety and distancing required.
- Today’s sermon title: “The Three Best Questions to Ask” when you are confused, uncomfortable, or uncertain – if you are none of these, then you might want to check your pulse and go watch something else.
- **I know that answers have been slow coming during this pandemic – and God has answers for us today – Are You In Control? RUNCtrl for short? Are you honest? We do not typically ask if God is in control for fear of getting a flat tire, hit by a lightning bolt, or even hemorrhoids – we sort of secretly ask this question. So this triggered me to think of the best questions in the bible to ask - In making progress in your relationship with God, this usually looks like having fewer answers and more good questions. So how do you know when you’re growing in your relationship with God? This is typically revealed when we have fewer answers and ask better questions.**
- The Lord showed me that there were three questions running in the background of our minds all of the time – that are determining or driving our state of mind – and we have to go all the way back to the prison and Paul’s letter to the Philippians.
- I’m not sure if you have a favorite book in the Bible – by far the most “functional book” in the Bible is the book of Philippians – by functional I mean it has been working for me – and the most functional chapter in the book of Philippians is chapter 1 – and this book has help me answer many questions – and help me answer the three questions that are controlling our lives.
- Yes we know that God is in control – and yes this triggers more questions and answers – if God is in control why is anyone overweight? If God is in control why would anyone get addicted? If God is in control why does anyone get abused? And we ask these questions as well.
- And yes we get intimidated and scared to ask these questions – but God is never scared or intimidated – what insults God is that we think He is so small that He has a delicate ego - and can get offended by our questions.
- **Yes God is sovereign – Yet how can he be so sovereign and we feel so stuck? How can God be so sovereign and yet some suffer so much? How can God be so sovereign and some struggle for so long? And I’m not confident enough to answer this question and I need to go to Paul as well. Yes God is in control yet he does not always take control.**
- **A Pastor Furtick Classic: When I gained 18 pounds when I first got married, God did not intervene and take the extra macaroni off of my dinner plate. God is not going to control the portion of**

**food that we eat – or the portion of news that we consume – God is not going to control the portion of the Bible that we read – God will let us watch as many episodes of a Netflix movie that we want – God will let you scroll Instagram until you throw up over the thought of another person's beautiful vacation – God is in control but He will not stop you.**

- If we are honest with ourselves, we want a remote-controlled God that can direct other people to do what we want them to do.
- He is not a remote-controlled God – He is the word that became flesh that dwelled among us so that His spirit can live within us. (Kev note: See John 1).
- **Recall Pastors Furtick's example of using one camera in focus and another camera out of focus. Are you in Control? If camera #4 is out of focus, the operator behind camera #1 is not able to control camera 4. This is how God Works – many things in our lives are out of focus during this pandemic – In the Elevation Church control room, our director (Chelsea) can switch to another camera by saying "take it" – not the operator. The operator of camera #1 does not control camera #4 – screaming at the camera #1 operator because camera #4 is out of focus is not going to fix anything – we can all remain in a state of confusion and complain about God all we want – God can give us a promise but we still need to take it – if we don't, we will not be effective and responsible with it – God can give us peace but we won't feel peace until we take it – God has given us restoration, redemption, and purpose – but we have to take it.**
- So let's learn the three questions we need to ask in order to be in control.
- A Pastor Furtick Classic: In the last seven months focus has been a matter of survival – and this means turning off all of the newsfeeds – and I know why it is called breaking news – because if we watch it around the clock it will break our brains.
- And we are going to read a passage of scripture and Paul's letter to the Philippians where it appears that God is not in control.
- See Phil 1: 12 to 25
- Paul is not focused on the resistance while in prison – He is he focusing on the results.
- The situation is uncertain but things have become clear (and in focus like Camera 1).
- We need to continue to rejoice even in our bathrobe while watching church in the living room – we should rejoice even when there's a cut back in the hours at work – we should rejoice even if we wake up in the middle of the night during a full-blown panic attack and praise our way back to sleep.
- Isn't it strange that Paul still considers it progress even while he's in prison?
- Paul must be measuring things differently and asking different questions – Paul does not give any answers to the questions that his followers probably asked him – questions like when are you getting out of prison?
- The church at Philippi is similar to what our own children might ask - are we there yet (when on a long trip)? Or - Do I have to? Do have to wash the dishes?
- And I need to think about all the bad questions that I ask – when I am impatient as to God's timing/provision.
- **In Paul's case, he tells them what he wants them to know - not necessarily what they want to know. God is that way as well – He tells us what He wants us to know – God controls the information flow to our lives – and God does not owe us an explanation for everything – God bless those that don't need a spotlight or to take credit for everything that they do – if God is**

not giving you the answer that you want, consider asking a better question. See Ex. 4. God answers Moses question with a better question: God asks What is your in your hand? When Moses asked the question “What if they don’t believe me?” This is a bad question – anytime your question revolves around other people, it is outside of the realm of your sovereign control. Moses is asking a hypothetical question about something he can’t control and God is asking Moses about something that is within his control.

- God will always ask about what is at hand – focus all of your time with what God has given you – God tells us that He has always given us “that” no matter what “they” do – What we are all talking about today is the power of a better question – and the proof of Christian maturity to ask few answers and ask better questions. Here are the three questions – all three are in the text.
  - What does it matter? (see vs. 18)
  - What does it mean? (see vs. 22)
  - What shall I choose?
- There are some great quotes found in Paul’s letter to Philippians – See vs. 18 of Phil 1.
- What does it matter? If we get this question wrong nothing else matters.
- A better way to title this sermon is “Confessions of a Control Freak.”
- Paul is so used to being in charge and he now realizes that he’s not able to call the shots this time – What is God going to do in the fog of the situation? – God does not control everything and he gives us choice.
- **Holly told us last week the Book of Philippians contains the word “rejoice” or “joy” 16 times – leading us think that the book is about joy – the book is really about freedom – that Paul is still in control of his state even though he can control nothing within his own circumstances – and these three questions are running your life in a back room – things don’t start where you see it – the cameraman is not controlling camera #1 – the cameraman reflects my thoughts – and the director in the control room reflects my questions – every thought that I have starts with a question – and if I start with a bad question like what’s wrong with me? – when we ask this question, it attracts 1 million answers (from your genetics to your jaw line) – because the devil has a list ready to pounce on this question – this is the most magnetic question in the entire universe – when we asked the question “what’s wrong with me?” - it activates every demon known since you were first conscious – it is the wrong question.**
- **And your questions direct the integrity of your thoughts – When Paul asks what does it matter? – he is setting the direction of his thoughts by focusing on the direction of his priorities – What does it matter?**
- In the case of Paul he’s asking about those that are taking advantage of the situation where their lead apostle is in chains and not able to leave prison – and others capitalize on the current situation.
- We are all quick to get offended and offense blocks flow – and I wish I spoke to Paul sooner because he would’ve save me a lot of time and aggravation over the last 40 years of my life – he would’ve taught me that human opinion does not matter as much as we think it does – sometimes we are interested in fitting-in - as in middle school – and sometimes we want to stand out - like during the college admissions process – and in both cases we stress about not letting anyone down – and the content of the questions we ask are continuously shifting.
- The first question is what does it matter?

- Why are you so stressed out about the insignificant things?
- **When we consider the question what does it matter? We have to decide on our in distractions. We all have to arrive at a place in Ministry where the goal is no longer to be impressive. The goal of this church community is to connect to the ways of heaven so that all of our needs are met – not to be impressive – however it takes us a while to learn what really matters.**
- Often times we don't realize how much it really mattered until after it happens – when we realize that an issue or concern was not that really important.
- **Ask God in advance what are your distractions? Not every disruption is a distraction – Paul is spreading the gospel all over the region – and things appear to have stopped – And Paul says – well - actually the gospel is moving forward – decide what really matters and don't outsource your priorities to a broken world that does not know its right from its left.**
- **Had I spoke to Paul earlier, I would have learned that a human opinion is nothing compared to a divine seal – when God puts His seal of ownership on us, people can think what they want and say what they want – and we are no longer are petty or jealous - stressing about things that don't matter.**
- Remember the WDIM bracelets following the sermon “Choosing your Chain's” from 7/23/2018?  
Kevin Note: See this link: <http://www.1peter315notes.com/files/128762923.pdf>
- The question What Does It matter? will eliminate about 90% of my prayer requests.
- Ask God to give you your priorities – and this will allow you to allocate resources properly.
- It is a clarifying question while you are in the fog of life.
- See Gen 18.
- Is anything too hard for the Lord – quit caring about stupid stuff – the motives of other people are not important – God's purpose is – Ask this question: Does this align with the purpose that God has for my life? We have too much purpose for us to be petty – Paul says that I am put here for the defense of the gospel – “who put it here” is not as important as “why it was put here” – Rome might be the reason as to why Paul is in prison however – However, the primary purpose Paul was put in prison was to defend the gospel.
- **Paul never asks how long he was going to be in prison - but rather he asks why am I put here? I wonder what would happen if we asked that about our lives – why were we put here? – not who was I put here by? Asking that question will only make you bitter – and then you'll start blaming people that did not support you – and then you'll start blaming people that did not encourage you – why you were put here for - matters the most. Make a list of things you should no longer care about – because we cannot care about everything – we were not designed to care about everything – our sanity matters more than how well-informed we are.**
- **Holly asked a great question last week – are you trying to prove a point or are you trying to keep the relationship? Paul says it does not matter what their motives were - what matters is what God's mission is – so we have to decide in our lives what is going to matter to us – what is going to matter to us in this season – what is going to matter to us in this moment – we can't care about and process everything all of the time – because if you do this you're not accessible to God – only available to everyone else.**
- What does it matter?
- We have to change some priorities in our lives if we are to expect Gods resources. In order to do this we have to answer this question – What does it Matter?

- What are we to do with all of the stupid stuff?
- The greatest way to stop being self-centered is to realize how and self-centered everyone else is.
- God will not control your priorities – you will.
- You will decide what matters to you.
- What does it matter? goes both ways – there are some things you care too much about and there are some things that you care too little about – In Paul's case his priority was that Christ is preached either by truth or false motives – the devil does not care how he takes you out – He just doesn't want you here in the presence of God.
- See 1 Kings 18 and 19.
- The prophet Elijah had great powers but was insecure in private – and asked the wrong questions in private – He looked really good in public – What do you need to push aside to make room for what is important – after Elijah called down fire on Mount Carmel and put to death all of the false Prophets, he went to cave – and the Lord whispered to him – What are you doing?
- See 1 Kings 19: 9-10.
- These are the words of a man that has done all that he can do – and has come to the conclusion that nothing matters – where he has given everything that he can and has used up all of his energy.
- Elijah sounds like the opposite of Paul – where he concludes that it is not going to get any better.
- Elijah concludes that he's done - he's fully drained - and there is nothing left.
- The irony is that he had enough faith where his words controlled the weather systems – he had enough faith to command a drought – and then bring rain. And the question that would bring him out of depression is the same question that we need to ask – what am I doing here?
- **Paul asked that question and concluded that he was in prison for a purpose – this is both a decision and an interpretation – he decided that because it was a product of his faith – Paul could have said that he is in prison because it's not fair and the system is broken – but focusing on what is broken will never set you free – if your question is how will they? or what will they? – We have got to ask the right question: What is that in your hand? What will you do? What has God called you to do in this season that can't be taken away? What can you speak? What can you activate? Goliath was threatening the Israelites and the people said he was too big – but David said he was too big to miss. God is telling us to ask a better question: What are you doing here you mighty man of valor? What are you doing here you unique daughter of God? What are you going to do after being inspired by the word of God?**
- Elijah was not running from Jezebel while in the cave - He was running from himself – because he got the question wrong.
- If the devil can't distract you he will discourage you.
- Do you think Paul knows that we now make bumper stickers on the stuff that he said in prison? He did not even know how much he mattered while in prison and neither do you.
- You are a parent that is leaving a legacy in your laying down good seed – you will not know how much it matters until after – control your focus now – and ask better questions.
- Rebuke the spirit of rejection right now if you are feeling discouraged – by the gospel of Jesus Christ you matter so much – have faith to believe – it will take some time to fully understand how much you really matter.

Additional study notes:

**Quote from Dr. Tim Keller in his sermon “A Reason for Living – a recap of John 1”** – *“What if we found the reason for life? Why we were created? Why we were designed? And conformed to that and then honored that? - If there is a design, there is a designer. And if there is a designer, the logos has come. Not some abstract philosophical principle. It is a person. The designer has punched a hole into the world and he has descended. And you were built not to just honor some philosophical principle. But you were built to know and love this divine person. When you know him and when you serve him and you find out what he built you for, when you comply with it and submit yourself to him, you find out who you are. And you are now able to reach your potential.”*

**When Bad Things Happen to Good People by Rabbi Harold Kushner:** “It may be that Einstein and the Book of Genesis are right. A system left to itself may evolve in the direction of randomness. On the other hand, our world may not be a system left to itself. There may in fact be creative impulses acting on it, the Spirit of God hovering over the dark waters, operating over the course of the millennia to bring order out of the chaos. It may yet come to pass that, as “Friday afternoon” of the world’s evolution ticks toward the Great Sabbath which is the End of Days, the impact of random evil will be diminished. Or it may be that God finished His work of creating eons ago, and left the rest to us. Residual chaos, chance, and mischance, things happening for no reason, will continue to be with us, the kind of evil the Milton Steinberg has called “the still un-removed scaffolding of the edifice of God’s creativity.” In that case, we will simply have to learn to live with it, sustained and comforted by the knowledge that the earthquake and the accident, are not the will of God, but represent that aspect of reality which stands independent of His will, and which angers and saddens God even as it angers and saddens us.”

**The Shack by William Young:** I (God) am not evil. You (humans) are the ones who embrace fear and pain and power and rights so readily in your relationships. But your choices are also not stronger than my purposes, and I will use every choice you make for the ultimate good and the most loving outcome. . . Broken humans center their lives around things that seem good to them, but that will neither fill them nor free them. Humans are addicted to power, or the illusion of security that power offers. When a disaster happens, those same people will turn against false powers they trusted. In their disappointment, they either become softened toward me or they become bolder in their independence. If you could only see how all this ends and what we will achieve without the violation of the human will – then you would understand. One day you will.”