

Sunday, Oct 18, 2020 at 9:30 AM

Broadcasting from Ballantyne Campus – Charlotte, NC USA – **with a live audience for the first time in 7 months.**

Pastor: Steven Furtick

Sermon Title: “What you do is up to you - But what it means is up to me. What does it Matter (Priorities)?, What does it Mean (Interpretation)?, and What Shall I Choose (Decision)? - It does not mean what you think it means – and success does not mean EGOT.”

Scripture for this week:

- **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.
- **Gen 50:** Joseph Reassures His Brothers - 15 When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?” 16 So they sent word to Joseph, saying, “Your father left these instructions before he died: 17 ‘This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.’ Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father.” When their message came to him, Joseph wept. 18 His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. “We are your slaves,” they said. 19 But Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? 20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. 21 So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them. 22 Joseph stayed in Egypt, along with all his father’s family. He lived a hundred and ten years 23 and saw the third generation of Ephraim’s children. Also the children of Makir son of Manasseh were placed at birth on Joseph’s knees.
- **Gal 5:** 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the

Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

- **See Phil 3:21** - 20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.
- **Romans 8:28**: And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

“What you do is up to you - But what it means is up to me. What does it Matter (Priorities)?, What does it Mean (Interpretation)?, and What Shall I Choose (Decision)? - It does not mean what you think it means – and success does not mean EGOT.”

- Please consider joining an eGroup (small group) so you don't have to walk this walk alone? – See www.elevationchurch.cc.
- Interested in leading an eGroup? See: www.elevationchurch.cc.
- New Bible Study for some eGroups – “The Art of Contentment” – A study of Philippians.
- Opening comments #1: It might get loud in here after seven months – This is sound of dry bones rattling – The joy of the Lord is my strength – Some say that we should be repenting and not rejoicing in this time – However repenting means to change your mind – And that is what Paul is telling us to do while in prison.
- Opening comments #2: Last week, we talked about taking control of your mind – Take it. And we looked at three questions that are running your mind whether you know it or not.
- Recap from last week:
 - 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?

- 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?
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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?
- **Our minds are always trying to answer these three questions: What does it matter? (see vs. 18), What does it mean? (see vs. 22), and What shall I choose? – and how we answer these questions determines if we live in a state of defeat or in a state of freedom.**

- This is not my teaching - this is the teaching that Paul gives us in Philippians.
- I have two readings today – Phil 1 and Gen 50.
- **What does it matter? is the most important question to ask – to ensure we are aligned with the correct priorities – and prevents us from giving resources to things that we will regret later.**
- Whether you realize it or not during this pandemic God has forced you to redirect resources – sometimes it is a gift from God – to eliminate things from your life – one author tells us that “trials tighten our lives” – and this is what is happening with Paul – if Paul tightens his focus on things that he can’t control, he will get confused and he will start to doubt what God is doing through him – One of the most important decisions that Paul makes is to “write off” the things he cannot control.
- In Phil 1, Paul asks “what does it matter?” in response to those that are preaching under false motives – their motive does not matter as much as God’s mission – while our minds are constantly fighting this battle as to what matters – it brings us back to the realization that some things matter more.
- See Phil 1:18 - 21
- **What matters to Paul the most is the gospel of Jesus Christ – His Kingdom – and this mattered more than his preferences or other people’s motives – which he has no control over. In vs. 18, Paul has chosen to rejoice. Make the choice to rejoice – and Paul continues to do it.**
- Say this: I did it – I am doing it – And I will continue to rejoice.
- **The resource is greater than the resistance – and we need to know this children of God – despite Paul being in prison he seems to be remarkably in command of the situation and condition of his soul – and we all need to learn how to do this.**
- When Paul speaks of deliverance and verse 19 he’s not talking about God getting him out of prison - he’s talking about God’ spirit filling Paul from within – inward deliverance.
- See vs. 20.
- **Paul’s construct is that he will be ok either way. We all need to say this by faith: Either way, we are still ok. This is the spirit of Paul’s faith – it was not manipulation - it was acceptance. It was about embracing what God is doing in this moment – not escaping but embracing – Paul is counting on courage not circumstance.**
- See vs. 21 and 22.
- Here we see the question – What does it Mean?
- If Paul is to go on living – this will mean fruitful labor for him.
- See Gen 50:19 to 23
- See vs. 20 – you have permission to shout over this.
- What you do is up to you but what it means is up to me.
- What does it mean? It is up to me.
- God tells us to have child-like faith - to be curious about God and be curious about things of the world – with this plan, we can’t fail and will succeed – and how exactly do we define success? – we can’t really answer the question what is success? until we understand what failure is.
- Sometimes short-term success is the ultimate failure – sort of like somebody that got in great physical shape but did it the wrong way – so if we do a good thing in the wrong way, it becomes its own problem.

- And we also can have a short-term failure that leads to long-term success – and many of us have experienced this in our own lives – how many of you have experienced a break up that turned out to be a blessing?
- One accomplished actor stated that his life goal is to win an EGOT (Emmy Award for a TV show, A Grammy for a song, an Oscar for a movie, and a Tony for a Broadway play). Without the T, it is just an ego. How many things that the world calls success the devil uses to get you to think that your life does not matter? – the EGO instead of an EGOT – and we need to start thinking about what we got? We got mercy – We got grace – We got love, peace, patience, kindness, joy, and self-control. We have the fruit of the spirit. (Kev note: See Gal 5:22). We got it. Have you ever got “it” and it did not do know what to do with it? Or when you get it and it feels empty - this is a really weird feeling. It is almost as worse as never getting it.
- Paul is showing us something here – going back to our sermon from last week back “Are You in Control?” – we are in control as to what success means to us – and if we align that with the worldly definition of success, we can expect (at some point) an emptiness to feel our spirit. This typically comes when we try to give our own definition of success to God’s concepts.
- We can take anything to mean anything that we want it to mean. Even in the bible. According to Paul, he is successful because the gospel is being preached even while being in prison. Paul uses the word “fruitful” in explaining this. This means more fruitful labor – it is working in Paul although the work that he is doing is limited. Yes, those who are you watching the sermon are probably not in physical prison – however, this dynamic applies to us as well – When Solomon said that everything is meaningless – everything is meaningless until you give it meaning – and here is where we get it backwards – when we searching for meaning, everything is meaningless until we give it meaning.
- What is failure? What is success?
- This changes with age and with each generation.
- The Philippians were very important to Paul since he started this church – anything birthed in pain we tend to value the most – Paul called these people “partners in the gospel” – and he loved him like that – when we say Jesus is lord, I wonder if Paul thinks we are merely saying it in a cultural way - and not the same intensity of thought as to when Paul said this to the people of Philippi. When Paul said this (Jesus is Lord), it was a costly confession since he was rejecting the empire (and his upbringing) to embrace the new Kingdom.
- When we say “Jesus is Lord” it probably means that we grew up in a Christian church – and not necessarily to do what Jesus says. When we say “Jesus is Lord” the correct definition is to trust Him with things that we can’t control.
- Here is another one: “Rejoice in the Lord.” We typically take this to mean that we sing in Church. Paul is not shaking a tambourine when he says that he is rejoicing in the Lord – to Paul “rejoicing in the Lord” means remembering the reason as to why he was called – it is far more than an external expression with peers – it is an internal decision.
- Here is another one: See Phil 4:13. “I can do all this through him who gives me strength.” This does not mean that we can play in the NBA when we are only 5’6”. Nor does this mean we should audition at American Idol. According to Paul, this means we should live within our god given capacity and live with contentment.

- The above statements (Jesus is Lord, Rejoice in the Lord, and I can do all things) require context. And when we see things in the right context, what we perceive as failure or set back – was really the grace of God working in our lives – We got it. It does not mean what you think it means – Church does not mean building – Worship does not mean a slow song – and success does not mean EGOT – Paul says, I have a reason to rejoice.
- **Let's revisit of the three questions: What does it Matter (Priorities)? What does it Mean (Interpretation)? What Shall I Choose (Decision)? What does it mean? and What shall I choose? go together – What does it mean depends on what you choose. See Phil 1:22. What you do is up to you - what does it mean is up to me. Paul says that you can chain me in prison if you want to – this just means that I have a captive audience to preach to. Paul says I am not chained to it, it is chained to me – so what you do is up to you – what does it mean is up to me. What is up to the jailer is up to him – what it means is up to Paul. He is choosing to work with God – to labor with God. God says work with me – stop fighting what God is trying to work in your life.**
- Some of you think that you have lost a lot and think that you are in a losing season – You really haven't.
- Let's go back to Gen 50 to learn what we are supposed to do when we think we are in a losing season.
- Joseph had lost a lot – first he lost an awesome multi-colored coat – the coat was the least valuable thing that he lost. Joseph also lost his sense of connection – We talked about context – now let's talk about connection – what it means is up to me – how can we say that God was with Joseph when he had to go through so much and experience so many adverse and disconnected events? – Most of us state that we are in God's presence – meaning we are in situations that confirm we are in His favor – when we say that God is blessing us we take this to mean that events are happening that are favorable to us – for the Bible to say that the Lord was with Joseph does not necessarily mean how Joseph felt while he was walking through his life – His story in Gen was written after the fact.
- **It is very difficult to understand what a seasoned means while we are still in it – Paul says this will mean fruitful labor and he looks forward to the future with expectation – and while Paul is in it - he chooses to see things this way.**
- **How do you interpret a losing season of your life? We wrongfully assume that God must be punishing us when we are in a difficult season. We all have secrets in our lives that make us an unlikely candidate for God's mercy and grace. We seem to live on an ego system of achievement – where we have to earn it. John 15 and Gen 50 are both helpful here.**
- See John 15:2. "2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful."
- Question: Who is he? If you don't know how to answer this question, you will misinterpret all the pain in your life.
- God prunes. The context in verse 1 provides the motive and what's going on in verse two – if we only think that it's the devil attacking us, we will miss the opportunity to bear fruit -
- **See John 15:1-2: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful." Jesus is the one that we need to stay connected to – He is the one that is in control – He is the one that gives us life – He is the one that gives us strength and the ability to**

grow – even if life is cutting into us, God is holding the scissors – even if a virus wrecked our plans, God is in charge of the situation – He is lord – He is in charge – He is in control. We may not have a lot of wisdom and experience but we have a Father – and if we have a Father, this means fruit – this means that God is bringing something out of the situation that is beyond our capabilities – and beyond our ability to predict and perform. The proof is in the pruning.

- Just because we do not hear God say much does not mean that he is not doing much.
- So how are we to interpret silence? When you're looking for a loss you will find it – when you're looking for God while going through the greatest loss of your life, you will find it as well.
- See Phil 3:21 - 20 – *“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”*
- Paul believes in the sovereignty of God.
- But I do not think it means what we think it means. We wrongfully conclude that things in life come with meaning – I once led a campus leadership seminar titled BYOM (bring your own meaning) – I need to keep confessing over my life – saying “this means more” - even when we fear that things appear to be moving away God's love – this means that God is pruning – Paul says that every branch that bears fruit means more pruning – and this requires fruitful labor – are you looking for love or are you counting the losses – whatever you look for you'll find a meaning to back it up.
- **What does it mean? Has God been trying to show you His love? Even when God wants to use you in a different way? Don't misinterpret the season you're in. Parents having difficulty with a 13-year-old is due to the fact that the child is 13 – not that you are an ineffective parent. We bring the meaning – we make it mean what we want it to mean. Others meant it for evil but God meant it for good. See Gen 50:20. And your life is not controlled by the intentions of your enemies. And your life is not limited by the scope of your circumstances. This is why Joseph was able to see rejection as direction.**
- We have a father and we have got faith. Apokaradokia (ap-ok-ar-ad-ok-ee'-ah) – Definition: anxious and persistent expectation. We eagerly expect – Paul had such great faith that he had to make up a word using other Greek words – to explain his expectation – he might not be able to explain it but he has it. Paul says that he has peace while in prison although he can't necessarily explain it. Paul has the kind of peace where he can't be bitter – he can't hate – and this is good teaching for us – what it means is up to us. God has left this responsibility up to us.
- **See Romans 8:28: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” When love is your lens, you see God in everything.**
- God loves a child so much that he gave a parent the opportunity to raise the child.
- **After a seed multiplies, it dies – When Christ died on the cross he said it was finished – not that it had failed – It does not mean what you think it means – this is more than a cliché – it is more than a slogan to help us feel better for a few minutes while we are in agony – walk around your life this week looking for fruit – God, show me what you are doing and show me what it means.**
- And I almost stopped at Gen 50:20 but something told me to keep reading.
- See Gen 50:21-23 – *“21 So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them. 22 Joseph stayed in Egypt, along with all his father's*

family. He lived a hundred and ten years 23 and saw the third generation of Ephraim's children. Also the children of Makir son of Manasseh were placed at birth on Joseph's knees."

- Verse 23 might not mean much to you but it meant a lot to Joseph – as a former prisoner in Egypt.
- **See Gen 41:50 to 52 – “Before the years of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph by Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On. 51 Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, “It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household.” 52 The second son he named Ephraim and said, “It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering.”** Manasseh means to forget. Joseph did not forget that his brothers tried to kill him and left him to die in a pit – it was not gone from his memory – so why did he name his son Manasseh? God does not tell us to forget what we’ve been through – somethings we never forget – the second son was called Ephraim – Ephraim means twice fruitful. God has made us fruitful in our failure – it is only over if you quit – so then I realized – God blessed Joseph with so much fruit that it was more than enough to get through all of the suffering. I know it has been a pruning season – those God loves, he prunes.
- God must really love us – look what he has done for us to overcome – God must really have a great plan for us – we wrongfully conclude that God has left us when the enemy attacks - the enemy attack is proof of how much God has put inside of us.
- Remember these questions: What does it Matter (Priorities)?, What does it Mean (Interpretation)?, and What Shall I Choose (Decision)?
- **Closing prayer: Remember these questions: What does it Matter (Priorities)?, What does it Mean (Interpretation)?, and What Shall I Choose (Decision)? Not only are you my Father, You are my Lord. And I believe that - and sometimes I rebel and sometimes I like to be my own god. I thank any tree that is planted by living water that will yield fruit in season - I declare that over everyone listening today – It is a wonderful privilege to be Pastor of this church – and there is so much fruit in this place – all through this season Lord - I see you continuously bringing fruit – for anyone here today walking through a pruning and losing season – know that we have a father – that chooses to know what is in our lives (and that is what makes you Lord) – how we choose to use it – is what moves us forward – And now God, I declare more fruit over our lives. If it is a season of cutting back and it feels like a setback – during a season that feels like you are silent, I know that you are up to something – just because you are quiet does not mean that you are not close – make us fruitful in that frustrating place – only you can do that – plant our lives in the soil of your purpose – you are in control. What it means is up to me. Give God praise today. As Paul says, He is still God even while in prison. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.**

Additional study notes:

Additional commentary by William Henry on Romans 8:28: *“The Spirit in the world helps; many rules and promises there are in the word for our help. The Spirit in the heart helps, dwelling in us, working in us, as a Spirit of grace and supplication, especially with respect to the infirmities we are under when we are in a suffering state, when our faith is most apt to fail; for this end the Holy Ghost was poured out. We must not sit still, and expect that the Spirit should do all; when the Spirit goes before us we must bestir ourselves. We cannot without God, and he will not without us. What help? Why, the Spirit itself makes intercession for us, dictates our requests, indites our petitions, draws up our plea for us. Christ*

intercedes for us in heaven, the Spirit intercedes for us in our hearts; so graciously has God provided for the encouragement of the praying remnant. The Spirit, as an enlightening Spirit, teaches us what to pray for, as a sanctifying Spirit works and excites praying graces, as a comforting Spirit silences our fears, and helps us over all our discouragements. The Holy Spirit is the spring of all our desires and breathings towards God. With groanings that cannot be uttered. The strength and fervency of those desires which the Holy Spirit works are hereby intimated."

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."