

**“Much Ado About Something”:
Exalting Christ by Exulting in Christ
Philippians 1:20-21**

Propositional Statement:

We will most confidently, consistently and completely magnify Christ’s glory when Christ is our greatest hope and treasure both in life and in death.

1. Introduction: An Eager Expectation and Hope

There are low expectations.... and there are high expectations. Consider sports. No one expects much of a person out of shape & without training to guide a team to victory in the Super Bowl. Those are low expectations. And then there are high expectations, external & internal, of athletes like Lance Armstrong & Tiger Woods. Fans expect much, but they expect even more of themselves. What fuels these expectations? Consideration of previous performance; current training & preparation; and knowledge of the challenges they face up ahead.

In today’s text, we’ll see what is arguably a far more significant expectation which the apostle Paul held for himself. We’ll consider:

- what his expectation was,
- why he held it with such eagerness and hope, and
- how we attain, *d.v.*, to a similar expectation for ourselves.

²⁰according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

2. Exalting Christ: “according to my earnest expectation and hope that ... Christ will be magnified in my body”

First define “eager expectation and hope.” Cf. Ro 8:19. Then we need to define “[Christ will] “be exalted”: μεγαλυνω, to esteem highly, to magnify, to extol. Related to noun μεγαζ, which means “great” (e.g., in power, in stature, in importance, in value, etc.). He’s speaking of the witness he gives to those around him: that Christ would be “seen as great” by virtue of his life and death. Let’s elaborate on this concept of exalting or “magnifying” (NKJV) Christ’s glory.

You can magnify with a microscope or with a telescope. A microscope magnifies by making tiny things look bigger than they are. A telescope magnifies by making gigantic things (like stars), which look tiny, appear more as they really are. **God created the universe [and especially the church] to magnify His glory the way a telescope magnifies stars.** (John Piper, *The Dangerous Duty of Delight*, p. 17)

There are three characteristics of the way in which Paul expects to exalt Christ:

- **Confidently:** Note the tone of confidence: “in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness”. Echoes of Ro 1:16, “I am not ashamed of the gospel [of Jesus Christ] because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.” **Exalting Christ is nothing to be ashamed of. Why? Because the gospel of Christ alone is the power of God to save men from their lost condition!** But we might say, “Paul, you didn’t live in the 21st century, with all of our advances in science & history & archaeology and plurality of religions! You lived in the same century of Jesus Christ. Of course it’s easy for you to be unashamed!” Yet such a view ignores passages like 1 Cor 1:18ff. Even as our world today looks upon us as “foolish naïve Christians” with the gullibility of “flat-earthers,” Paul faced similar ridiculing and even more than that, persecution. Paul could be confident in the face of Jewish & Greek mockers and persecutors because **he knew the gospel to be nothing less than the power of God**. So Paul expects to exalt Christ with confidence, no matter the opposition.
- **Consistently:** Paul also expected to exalt Christ *consistently*, no matter the circumstances: “Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body.” He looked back on his life since conversion, and considered his present circumstances, and was certain that Christ would be exalted, no matter the persecution. Even now, as he was in prison, he was confident that his life would, in fact, exalt Christ. And this wasn’t in his imagination (cf. 1:12-13).
- **Completely:** The last way, and the most amazing (I think) facet of his expectation of a Christ-exalting existence, was that he expected to exalt Christ whether by life or by death! He doesn’t simply expect to exalt Christ as a preacher per se; or as a church planter. He even includes his own death in the circumstances that he expects to exalt Christ! Whether in life, or in death; Paul was certain that Christ’s glory would be displayed & magnified to those who knew and met him.

[transition to next point] This takes us, then, to the next major point in our text. We understand that Paul’s eager/earnest/confident expectation was that in his earthly body, Christ would be exalted, no matter what: no matter the challenges, persecution, circumstances, or even we might say, no matter if he was breathing or not! [reference back to text, esp. v 21] At this point, we might respond, “Noble ideals, Paul! But what gives you such confidence? It’s because you’re an apostle! It’s because you’ve actually had a vision of Christ! It’s because you’re gifted! None of that applies to us today, certainly not in the same proportion.” But such a response would be wrong. Because, as we’re about to see, Paul’s expectation of exalting Christ was not rooted in his own abilities or “past performance,” but rather, in Christ himself.

The preposition “for” in v.21 tells us that we will find there the justification for his high expectations of exalting Christ. Let’s first consider what he says about why Christ will be exalted in his life...

2.1. **In life** (v. 21a): ***Everything in Paul's life related to Jesus Christ***. (cf. 1 Cor. 10:31, 1 Peter 2:9). There was no facet of Paul's life that was not connected to the glory of God, and finding his joy in Christ. Consider his words in 1. Cor 10:31: "So then, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." In other words, so glorious is God that there is nothing in life that should not be connected to him. So worthy of treasuring, so wonderful to delight in is God; that He is worth your devotion; and others will see it. **People could not help but see some reflection or display of the worth of Christ, because Paul, in a very real sense, had given everything he had to gain Christ!**

Think of the parable (Matt 13:44-45) of the man who found a treasure hidden in a field, who in his joy over the treasure goes and sells everything he has to buy the field and gain the treasure. What would this man's acquaintances think? "That must be some treasure!" So too, that Paul's entire life revolved around Christ made an impact on those around him: "Christ must be some treasure!" The worth of Christ was exalted in Paul's life because his greatest joy was in Christ, and that served as a visible testimony to the worth of Christ as Savior, Lord, Redeemer, Friend, et al.

So we know that Paul's life was Christ-exalting because for him, "to live was Christ." But how is it that Paul expected to magnify the glories of Christ even in death? Let's look at what he writes in v.21.

2.2. **In death** (v. 21b): ***Death is gain*** What does Paul mean that to die is gain (profit!)? Read v.23. Death is gain because death brings us to Christ! In other words, for Paul, to die is Christ! Not only was Paul's entire perspective on life revolving around Jesus Christ; so too his very attitude towards death centered on the person of Christ. Remember in 1 Corinthians where Paul quotes OT and says, "O death, where is your sting? O death, where is your victory?" This is because for most "normal people" **death is considered painful and ultimately victorious over everyone! Yet Paul expresses a longing for death.** Why? Because the gospel gave him victory over death: to die meant to gain the ultimate prize: entering into the presence and glory of His great and glorious King. The hymn "The Sands of Time Are Sinking," inspired by the writings and life of Samuel Rutherford, describes this Christ-centered mindset of death and heaven beautifully:

*The bride eyes not her garment, but her dear Bridegroom's face;
I will not gaze at glory but on my King of grace.
Not at the crown He giveth but on His pierced hand;
The Lamb is all the glory of Emmanuel's land.*

Death and its consequence was not the end of anything: it was the fulfillment of his greatest desire and delight: perfect eternal fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

What does this have to do with exalting Christ? Paul knew that Christ would be magnified even in his death because his attitude towards death – eagerness – was shaped by his desire to rejoice in the presence of Christ. Those who looked at Paul could see that the glory of Christ was so great that even all of the riches and possibilities of this life could not compete with his desire to be in His Savior's presence.

Longing for heaven/death is not simply escapism. Put another way, to die is not merely putting away the bad effects of sin. Paul doesn't say, "to die is not loss." Paul looked at death as great riches not merely lack of poverty. Christians should not welcome death just because it's an escape from the harsh world (even suffering unbelievers will do that, e.g. euthanasia); but because it's a welcoming into the presence of Christ!

[transition to application] So we see that Paul's expectation of a Christ-exalting life & death was rooted in what we might call a deep-rooted exulting in Christ. So completely was his joy and hope in both living & dying connected to the glory and beauty of Christ that men could not help but see that glory and that beauty magnified clearly when they saw Paul. Paul's approach to life and attitude towards death served as a telescope for others to see the worth(iness) of Christ.

The wonderful thing for us in this is that Paul's expectations of a Christ-exalting existence were, as I hinted earlier, not based on his own qualifications, circumstances or life. Rather, it was rooted in the greatness and glory of Christ. His exultation (joy) in Christ was rooted in the fact that Christ was so exceeding all other possible joys, that nothing else could compete. Just as it is no challenge for a sports-car enthusiast to get excited about a Ferrari, because a Ferrari is an amazing car; it should be no challenge of a person who's been given a new heart to love God to actually do so as he becomes more aware of the all-surpassing glories of God. Paul was not joyful because he was great; but because the object of his delight was altogether great!

So then, the key for us to be Christ-exalting to the same degree of confidence as Paul is to come to a similar point of Christ-exulting as Paul. How can we do that? How can we come to treasure, delight in, and exult in Christ in so all-encompassing a fashion as Paul? Let me offer a few concrete suggestions:

3. **Application:**

- 3.1. **Apply yourself to knowing and exulting in Christ,** In his book "Let the Nations Be Glad!" John Piper advises with respect to missionary ventures: "You can't commend what you don't cherish." What he means is that a genuine sustainable exaltation & proclamation of the Christ of the gospel of Christ is impossible if there is not sustaining it a deep and abiding cherishing of the Christ of the gospel. This is really the same thing that we are considering today, in a different light. You will most confidently and consistently and completely magnify Christ's glory to the world around you when Christ Himself is your greatest joy and treasure and hope.

So we must grow in our worship and joy in Christ. And I would offer to you that one of the key problems, notwithstanding a need for the power of God's Spirit in our lives, is a lack of knowledge of, meditation on, and celebration of the excellencies of God in Christ. Too easily, in our desire to glorify God in such activities as parenting, marriage, employment, etc.; we turn to methodologies, self-discipline, and religious principles. But our great failing is not lack of technique. It is that we are far too ignorant of Christ's excellencies – infinite and far-surpassing as they are – and we are too often distracted by the temporal concerns. If only we would "fawn" over Jesus Christ as a car collector fawns over his precious antique roadsters, we will find that Christ's glories will begin to serve as a magnet for our affections, joys and hope. And only then, will we truly begin to have Christ-exalting lives rooted in Christ-exulting hearts.

Practically, then, here are few ideas:

- 3.1.1. Read your Bible not simply looking for tips about how to be holy or other “practical relevant things”; but rather pointers to the beauty and splendor and worth of Jesus Christ. Only in growing more intimately familiar with his greatness, will our affections and exultation in Him increase.
 - 3.1.2. Read Christian books, with titles such as “The Glory of Christ” or “Knowing Christ”, and not merely, “How to be a good witness for Christ” or “10 easy ways to tell people about Christ.” Other examples, beyond evangelism, are parenting, marriage, singleness, employment, etc. In all these things, there are earthly goals, but all are secondary to the calling to live a God-glorifying (Christ-magnifying) life! **“You have gotta have fuel if you’re gonna have a flame!”**
 - 3.1.3. When gathering with other believers in occasions formal and informal, let your conversation often be of the things you are learning about the Savior. Let there often be references – not forced, hopefully, but borne out of genuine spiritual growth – to the kindness of God, the mercy of God, the comfort of God, the justice of God, etc. May our fellowship opportunities be filled not merely with temporal concerns, but eternally-minded exultation.
- 3.2. **“Condition” yourselves for death as gain.** We live in a culture that is in practical denial of death and obsessed with long life... press hard against the flow [Possible reference to Chinese culture, where even talking about death is avoided for superstitious reasons]. Think often of your own perspective on death, with a view to transforming your mind to have a Christ-honoring view of death. Rather than avoiding the subject of death, think about it in a Biblical fashion: as something that has been swallowed up in Christ. Death is no more a threat to you, if you are saved, than a breath of air to a massive skyscraper.

As a practical suggestion, I commend to you Jonathan Edwards’ words in his sermon on heaven:

You must, in your meditations and holy exercises, be much engaged in conversing with heavenly [godly] persons, and objects, and enjoyments. You cannot constantly be seeking heaven, without having your thoughts much there. Turn, then, the stream of your thoughts and affections toward that world of love, and towards the God of love that dwells there, and toward the saints and angels that are at Christ’s right hand... ‘Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.’ (Col. 3:2).

- 3.3. **Test yourself: is this your eager expectation and hope.** Examine every facet of life to see whether, in fact, for you, to live is Christ. Test yourself to see if in fact, you believe, that death is gain (i.e., Christ!). Aim for a life that magnifies Christ confidently, consistently (at all times) and completely (in all circumstances).

4. **Conclusion:** One of William Shakespeare's plays is titled "Much Ado About Nothing." This comedy details, as its title suggests, much frantic activity over what are actually straightforward circumstances – what Shakespeare refers to as "nothing." We might call this, "making a mountain out of a molehill." The characters in his play expend much energy and concern ("much ado") over what proves to be nothing at all; yet therein lies the comedy. Their "much ado" is an attempt to cast attention on – to "magnify" -- what turns out to be *nothing*. Yet we have Christ. We have a Savior and God of immeasurable greatness, love, power and glory. Let there be in us much treasuring, much hope, much devotion, much desiring after, much **exultation in Christ**. In other words, **"much ado" about something, viz., the Lord Jesus Christ**, so that our lives may serve as telescopes for the world to see his glory and splendor and worth.