

**+ Philippians 1:18b-26 + Rejoice that Christ Is Glorified in Us! +
+ 8th Sunday after Pentecost + 10 July 2016 +**

S.D.G.—three letters, really three initials for a three-word Latin phrase, three letters that could be found at the end of nearly every musical manuscript penned by one of the greatest composers and musicians in human history. Three letters—S.D.G.—*Soli Deo Gloria*—“*To God Alone Glory*.” With the completion of every piece of music he composed, Johann Sebastian Bach wrote in large type those three letters—S.D.G. It didn’t matter if the piece was instrumental or vocal, sacred or secular. Every piece was dedicated to the glory of God alone.

...But why make such a dedication? Why write those initials at the end of musical works obscure or world-renowned? Why attach those three letters—S.D.G.—to the end of his life’s work? Bach wanted to glorify God with his musical abilities and the brilliant compositions that he produced, but Bach didn’t just want to bring God praise and glory.

No, Bach wanted all praise and glory to be directed to his gracious God who had not only made him a musical genius, but above all, had made the composer his own. Bach well knew the greater grace of God was in rescuing his soul from an eternity in hell. So Bach urged everyone who played, sung, or heard his music to glorify his gracious God. In a proper sense, Johann Sebastian Bach was living out what John the Baptizer once said about Jesus, “**He must become greater, I must become less.**” (John 3:30)

When you take a look at your life—what you’ve done, what you’ve said, what you’ve thought, what your outlook on life and death is, could the letters S.D.G.—*Soli Deo Gloria*—describe your life? Do you direct all glory and praise to God who provides for you and blesses you, who even helps you through times of difficulty and hardship, grief and pain? Do you direct all glory to the Lord when he blesses you in the unique callings he has given to you? Has Christ been glorified in your life? Will he be glorified in your life?

Now this is deeper than what you often see on TV when a professional athlete thanks God for giving him the talent to utterly destroy his opponent on the playing field. This isn’t just talking about the use of your God-given talents, but how Jesus is glorified in every aspect of your life—even when things aren’t so glorious and even in your death.

This morning we return to the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Philippian Christians where we find Paul concerned with the answer to the question—Will Christ be glorified in my life and my death? You see, Paul was in a difficult situation. He had been in prison for several years and was now under house arrest in the imperial capital of Rome. You can almost hear him wondering, “Will I ever get out?” “Will I get out alive?” The possibility of death by execution still loomed over him. “What if the emperor decides to rule against me?” As we heard last week, there were troubles brewing in some of the congregations he had started. Fear, doubt, and despair were trying to break him down, and he could’ve given up, yet Paul rejoiced.

Paul rejoiced? How would you react if you were in a difficult situation like that? Paul should’ve broken under the strain. Doesn’t your sinful nature try to do the same to you and crush you when problems rear their ugly heads? The bills pile up endlessly and the money isn’t there to pay them. Problems in your family or your marriage pop up. Your health or the health of a loved one falls apart. Our world seems like it’s getting worse every week.

Sometimes the problems seem so heavy you wonder if it’s really worth bearing them. That’s your sinful nature trying to push you into despair by making you question the Lord’s motives, really to rob him of his glory. “How can I possibly handle this?” “What am I going to do?” Your sinful nature wants you to curse God rather than glorify him. It wants you to curse God for making your life difficult. It wants you to give up on God, but any attempt to control your own life only leads to ruin and destruction.

Paul could’ve cursed God, but instead he rejoiced! “**Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.**” Paul hoped for freedom, for “**deliverance.**” Each day he grew more confident of his release. In the verses before our text, Paul rejoiced that the Gospel was still being preached, even though he was confined to house arrest. The Philippians had encouraged him with their prayers and had sent one of their own to minister to Paul while he was in prison. Yet Paul had an even greater reason to rejoice.

“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.” Paul’s confidence was in Christ. The earthly outcome of his imprisonment was still uncertain, but Paul looked forward to the future with

all the eagerness of a child on Christmas morning busting out of his bed to get to the presents under the tree. Paul wasn't about to curse God. No, he longed to glorify God!

Jesus had perfectly fulfilled his heavenly Father's will, so Paul had complete confidence in his Lord for the future. Jesus had carried out God's plan of salvation for him, so Paul knew that, even in life's most difficult situations, Christ would be glorified. As long as God allowed him to live, Paul's life would be devoted to glorifying Christ. ***"For to me, to live is Christ..."***

Paul explains further, ***"If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? 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 joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me."***

God wasn't done with Paul yet, even though death and going to heaven seemed like a better option. For the sake of God's people, Paul needed to remain alive and continue his work. In fact, living would be ***"fruitful labor"*** in the Lord and would lead others to glorify God in their lives. Even though it seemed like everything was against him, as long as he lived, Paul could tell others about their Savior. We heard last week how so many in Rome and beyond were hearing the good news of Jesus. Paul continued to pray for and encourage his churches through his letters. As long as God allowed him to live, Paul's life would be devoted to glorifying Christ.

Did you know that you can have that same confidence in Christ? Jesus carried out every last command of his Father's holy will for you. Jesus perfectly glorified God in every aspect of his life, but he did it to make you holy before the holy God. For your sake, Jesus allowed himself to be crucified on the cross to forgive your sins, even for those times when you've either turned your back on God or failed to glorify him. Now through faith, Jesus gives you the confidence to rejoice in this life, even when it's difficult.

Now Christ lives in you as Paul wrote in Galatians 2:(20), ***"I have been crucified with Christ and no longer live for myself, but Christ lives in me."*** Martin Luther once said, "Someone knocks on the door of my heart and asks, 'Who lives here?' The answer comes out, 'Martin Luther used to live here, but he died. Jesus Christ lives here now.'" Through baptism, you died to this world and now Christ lives in you. For that reason, your whole life is lived for Christ and for his glory alone. He gives you the power to do that. Without him, bearing up under life's problems would be impossible. Through Jesus, you can keep on living, even struggling through this life. Like Paul, you also can be confident that while you live, God has a divine purpose for you, a purpose which you may not even realize until you get to heaven.

Empowered by the Gospel, you can live in Christ and glorify him. Even if it's physically more difficult for you to serve in the way you'd like or the way you used to, you can still pray for your fellow believers in Christ, for your pastor, for your church body, and for those who still need to hear about Jesus. You can still tell others about the hope that you have. You can still be a faithful model for other believers so they too may glorify God in every aspect of their lives. You can still joyfully serve and glorify God, even when life is hard. You can do that because Christ lived for you.

...But that's not the only reason you can rejoice that Christ is glorified in your life. In verse 21, Paul boldly proclaimed, ***"For to me, to live is Christ AND TO DIE IS GAIN."*** ***"To die is gain?"*** Why would Paul consider death to be gain? Why would any of us ever consider death to be a blessing? Paul was still under the threat of execution. His life was in the emperor's hands, but Paul had no fear of what lay beyond death. You see, Paul rejoiced that through death he would be with his Savior for all eternity. Paul couldn't lose. Whether he lived or died, Christ would be glorified in him.

So I ask again, why would any of us ever consider death to be gain? Death is naturally terrifying. It is the unnatural result and wages of sin. None of us eagerly looks forward to the actual act of dying, but rather we eagerly look forward to eternal life. Christ defeated death! He abandoned the grave—and so will we! Even in death Christ is glorified in us! Paul rejoiced in that fact in 1 Corinthians 15:(54b-57), ***"Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O Death, is your victory? Where, O Death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."***

Death no longer holds its icy grip of fear on your heart. Instead Jesus has made death a sleep, a doorway through which you pass to the ultimate blessing—eternity with him in heaven. ***"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain!"*** One day that ultimate victory through Jesus will be yours in full. No longer will you feel the

sorrows and pains of this life. No longer will threats and evils and violence harm you, but rather you will be with Jesus, who shed his blood for you and conquered death so you could have life.

How will those three letters—S.D.G., *Soli Deo Gloria*—describe your life in the future? How will they describe the end of your life? Thankfully what brings glory to God alone comes not from your hands, but from Christ's nail-pierced hands. What brings glory to God alone comes not from your talents or gifts or abilities, but from what Christ has accomplished for you and accomplishes through you. What brings glory to God alone is not your work, but Christ's alone. Knowing that, let this be your purpose as it was for Paul—***“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.”*** Whether in life or in death, to God alone be glory both now and forevermore. Amen.