

What if... Heaven is Real?

Philippians 1:21-30

PPT Title

What if Heaven is Real?

Main Point: Believers are citizens in heaven, and it should change the way we live.

Key Verse: *Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ.* - Philippians 1:27 (NLT)

Props: One of the heart stickers from last week; soccer ball; dry erase board & marker

INTRO/BACKGROUND

Last week we saw Paul, in prison, saying basically, "I don't love being in prison. But I still have joy because I understand that sometimes, what looks like trouble to us is really God doing something amazing!" Other people might see Paul in chains and say, "You have got to be kidding. There's nothing good about that!" But Paul saw with kingdom eyes. Who can tell me what Paul saw? **Hold up a heart sticker from last week as a hint.** He saw God's love spreading to prisoners, and guards, and officials. Without Paul in prison, those tough guys might not ever hear about Jesus!

LIFE IS...



Who has ever seen one of these kinds of shirts? **Let the Sound Tech run through 3 "Life" t-shirt slides. Leave up the Soccer shirt.** Who can tell me what's wrong with these slogans or sayings? Is soccer really all there is to life? Well, let's think about this.

Hold up soccer ball. Can soccer bring you joy? (Yes - when you play well or win) What about when you play lousy? What about when you lose the game?



Can soccer bring you peace? (Yeah, maybe a little bit, if it's going really well.) But when you blow a goal, I think you might feel the opposite of peace.

And if soccer is your life, what happens if you break your leg and can't play? Is your life over?



Did soccer create you? Can soccer save your life? Can soccer give you eternal life?

It's really important that you don't base your life on something you can lose. Let's see what Paul had to say about this.

For to me, living means living for Christ... - Philippians 1:21a (NLT)

Another way of saying this is: *For me, life finds all of its meaning in Christ...* (NIrV)

Paul was so wise. Paul knew that Jesus created him in the beginning (Colossians 1:15-16), Jesus lovingly took away his sin so that he could have eternal life (1 Timothy 1:15), Jesus' truth guided him every day (Titus 1:1), and Jesus is the one thing we can never lose (John 10:28-29)!

Application: So what about you? If you had to make a t-shirt for all the world to see, what would it say? "Life is... (what)"? It's fine to have hobbies and things you are good at. But if there's anything you have put above Jesus in your life, you are not living the life God has designed for you. That sport or hobby or even a special *person* will never give you complete joy, peace, and life. You could possibly lose that thing. Base your life on the One thing, our One King, Jesus.

Say: We should take a moment here to point out that Paul was not saying: Life means living for Jesus because that means I'll never have any trouble. Quite the opposite. When we look at Paul's life, we see a man who suffered quite a bit for the purposes of God (). He was arrested, beaten, thrown in jail, and shipwrecked! But Paul knew that no matter what happened, God would make something great out of all of it - for Paul and for the kingdom of God.

TO DIE IS GAIN

The next words out of Paul's mouth might really shock you.

For to me, living means living for Christ, and *dying is even better*. - Philippians 1:21 (NLT)

better

What? Paul is saying dying will be *better* than living. How can that be?

Paul was absolutely certain that heaven is real! The Bible tells us that heaven is a perfect place, where perfect people and perfect angels live with the perfect God (Hebrews 12:22-24). Heaven is too beautiful for us to imagine! There is a city right in the middle where nothing is broken. It is so beautiful that it has streets of gold that look like clear glass. There's a tree that has 12 different kinds of fruit! (Revelation 22:2) There is no sickness, sadness or death (Revelation 21:4). Heaven is full of beautiful music. There's no darkness or night, because God's glory lights everything up (Isaiah 60:19). This probably means no bedtime! Everything in heaven is absolutely perfect.

There's no suffering of any kind in heaven. No wonder Paul looked forward to it. No chains, no beating, no prisons. No blisters on his feet from walking for days, no sunburn on his face from weeks out on the open sea. And best of all: JESUS. Paul couldn't wait to spend forever hanging out with his beloved Jesus.

Application: People who are not believers in Jesus believe that death is the worst thing that can ever happen. Certainly, death has a sad aspect for those who lose a loved one to death. They love the person and will miss them, but for the believer, death means heaven! It means no more tears, no more sadness, no more struggling with sin! It means spending forever with Jesus in a unimaginably beautiful place.

PROS AND CONS

Have you ever heard of a "List of Pros and Cons"? When people have a decision to make, sometimes they list out the good parts on one side (called Pros) and the bad parts on the other side (called Cons). Use the white board to make your list. Draw a line down the center of the board. At the top of one side, write Pros with a smiley face, and Cons with a frowning face. For example... **call up a volunteer**. What is your hardest subject in school? Ok. Let's say you are trying to decide whether to study for your ____ test next week. What are the Cons - the parts you won't like? (Time to study, Less time for playing, it's boring, etc) Ok, what is the good part of studying? (Get smarter, get a good grade, next test is also easier, parents are happy, etc) So, when you look over this list, which side seems more important? (For very young kids, use whatever example is appropriate for your grade. Kindergarteners might struggle with whether they should share cookies with a sibling.) One side is better than the other. **Thank your volunteer**.

Erase the example, leaving Pros and Cons. As we continue reading, we'll see that Paul sort of did a Pros and Cons list about staying alive on Earth to help his friends. Of course, Paul couldn't really decide this! God decides how many days we live (Job 14:5). I think Paul was just talking this through so he could see the good in God's plan.

If I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don't know which is better. I'm torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me. But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live.

Knowing this, I am convinced that I will remain alive so I can continue to help all of you grow and experience the joy of your faith. And when I come to you again, you will have even more reason to take pride in Christ Jesus because of what he is doing through me. - Philippians 1:22-26

Pros ☺ more fruitful work help you grow your joy	Cons ☹ Have to wait for heaven
---	-----------------------------------

So looking over this list, Paul decided it's better put others first (like Jesus taught us to do). He lived like Jesus did, doing what was best for others, knowing he would get his reward of heaven later.

CITIZENS OF HEAVEN

citizen

Say: The last part of Paul's writing that we'll read today is about citizenship. Does anyone know what it means to be a citizen? The dictionary says a citizen is a person who belongs to a state or nation. The person is loyal to that government and is protected by it.

Ask: What country do we live in? If you are born in America, you are automatically a citizen. Can other people (who weren't born here) become citizens? Yes, but it's not that easy. They must learn all about our country and even take a test about it's history. Then they take an oath. That means they make a very serious promise.

1. They promise that they have no loyalty to any other country;
2. They will be loyal to America - by following it's Constitution and laws; and
3. They are willing to serve America.

(Teacher Note: This is obviously a very simplified version of the oath, so kids can follow. The full Naturalization Oath can be found online.)

When someone becomes a citizen, they become unified with other Americans. They are part of the whole. They have privileges or rights (the right to worship God however they want and the right to free speech, just to name a couple). And our country promises to protect them.

VIDEO
(approx 3 min.)

Take a look at these people who have come from many different countries, but want to have the rights and responsibilities of being a United States citizen:

http://videos.nj.com/star-ledger/2013/07/video_new_us_citizens_take_oat.html

Listen to where Paul says we are really citizens:

citizen

Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ. - Philippians 1:27a NLT (Option: Continue reading to the end of Philippians 1:30 for older kids.)

Whoa. For all who believe in Jesus, we are members in the kingdom of God. Our citizenship is in heaven! Let's compare that to our citizenship here. Unlike in a country, no one is "born" into God's kingdom. Everyone must chose to enter God's kingdom. But there is no test to take or oath to promise. We enter when we believe in Jesus (John 6:29). But, the condition of our heart must be similar.

1. First of all, by believing in Jesus, we are turning away from every other kingdom. We say “no” to the kingdom of darkness. We turn away from the kingdom of self (where I think I know the best way to do things). No other kingdom of nation can be as important as God’s kingdom in our life.
2. Next, we want to be loyal to God’s kingdom and our King Jesus! We will follow God’s principles and laws that we find in the Bible. We don’t do this because someone is *making* us. We do it because we trust our King. We truly believe His way is the best way and so we’ll follow His rules.
3. We are willing to serve in any way our King asks us to.

And because we are citizens in God’s kingdom, we have wonderful privileges. We are unified with other believers. God protects us and pours out His blessings on us. One day we will all live together in heaven.

PPT Main Point

Application: All those who believe in Jesus are citizens in heaven, and it should change the way we live. We no longer do whatever feels right to us. We look to our King, trust Him, and follow His ways. That’s the key to joy and full life now and forever.

PPT Key Verse

Key Verse: *Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ.* - Philippians 1:27 (NLT)