

Text: Philippians 1:19-26

Title: Christ Honored in Life and in Death

Truth: Paul trusted he would be delivered to minister longer, but if not, that Jesus Christ would be honored in him anyway.

Date/Location: Sunday December 12, 2021 at FBC

Introduction

Philippians 1:19-26 ¹⁹ For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, ²⁰ according 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.

²¹ For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain. ²² But if I live on in the flesh, this *will mean* fruit from *my* labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, *which is* far better.

²⁴ Nevertheless to remain in the flesh *is* more needful for you. ²⁵ And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, ²⁶ that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.

Paul was not completely sure how things would turn out: release from prison and life; *or* condemnation and a death sentence. But he had a good idea where the outcome was headed (Phil. 1:24-25, 2:24).

I. Christ Magnified No Matter the Outcome, v. 19-20

A. Paul was confident that the prayers of his fellow believers and the work of the Holy Spirit would result in his deliverance. Note those means of rescue: the prayers of God's people and the work of the Holy Spirit. In God's sovereign plan, both are necessary elements!

But what kind of *deliverance* is he talking about? Is it deliverance from prison or deliverance to final salvation? The latter seems unlikely because Paul knew he was heaven-bound regardless of the

legal outcome. I take him to mean deliverance from prison. Somehow, he had a confident expectation that he was going to get out—at least this time—and be able to continue ministry.

- B. He does not want to be ashamed of his place and service in Christ. He wants to be a bold witness for Jesus and the gospel. Any displeasure that he sensed from Jesus was far worse in his mind than any displeasure he would experience from the Roman authorities. He did not want to deny Jesus. See Romans 1:16, Eph. 6:19, 2 Timothy 1:8.
- C. Paul's utmost desire is that Christ would be glorified. The tool that Paul possesses to magnify Christ outwardly to others is his body. That is how others see the glory of Christ, because they cannot see it in our thoughts or desires. They can only see it in how we conduct ourselves with our bodies—our speech and actions. Paul is so serious about honoring Jesus that He wants to do so in life and even in death. He wants to die well so that no disrepute is brought to Christ, and that he will have nothing to be ashamed about before the Lord (1 John 2:28).

II. Live or Die? v. 21-23

I could title this section “Christ or Gain?” or “More Fruit or Far Better?”

- A. Paul's estimation of life is that living *is* Christ and that dying is gain. Both are good—He can live to honor Jesus, or He can go to be *with* Jesus—which is even better than the best life has to offer.
- B. **If he lives**, he can serve God more, and thus reap more fruit from that service—and that is the way that Christ will be magnified in his body. What is his labor? It is Christian work. What does it mean to reap fruit from that ministry? It means more people saved and following Jesus and worshipping Jesus and becoming more like Jesus. For Paul, this results in reward in heaven, but Paul does not only minister for the reward he can get out of it. Rather, he serves God because it is God's pleasure for Him to serve, it is Paul's duty to serve God (Luke 17:10), Paul was saved to serve (Hebrews 9:14), and it honors God for more people to come to faith in Jesus.

C. **If he dies**, his soul leaves his body and goes to heaven and lives with Jesus. He also gets to be with all the other believers who have died—but they are not the main attraction of heaven. If the apostle dies as a martyr, Christ is honored / magnified in Paul, only this time in death instead of life.

Notice that Paul is completely confident that he will be with Christ. He will not be in a state of suspended animation, a state of soul sleep, of temporary residence purgatory, nor reincarnated. He will be WITH Christ (2 Cor. 5:8). Those other ideas are false teachings that are out of accord with the Christian Scriptures.

D. In summary, for the Christian, there are two right options: living for Christ, or going to be with Christ. If he lives, he can continue Christian ministry. If he dies, he gets a “far better” thing. There is another “option,” but it is not a good one: to live for yourself.

E. Which one is the better choice—live for Christ or die and be with Christ? Paul honestly has a tough time choosing which one he would pick. This is what he means when he says, “I am hard pressed between the two.” The desire to go to Christ weighs against his desire to stay and continue ministry. Other factors come into play regarding staying because there is real fruit, and real need, and real reward, and real satisfaction in living for the Lord.

Note that he does not get to make the choice, but hypothetically if he had to do so, which would it be? He honestly cannot say.

In this situation, he must cast himself on the Lord’s mercies and trust that God has made the best choice for him.

F. What about you? If you are presented with these two options—life or death, Christ or gain, do you have a favorite, or is it a toss-up as to which outcome is better?

1. I suspect many of us would pick “live on in the flesh.” We are familiar with it, we love it, we do not want to leave, we have so much to do, we love our family, etc. Maybe the practical reality is that for you, going to be with Christ is good, but staying here is far better. If that is your inclination, then I want you to pause for a moment and reflect like this:

Do you really want to live on in the flesh so that you can experience more of Christ? Or do you have other underlying motivations such as love with this world? Are you not yet ready to die? Are you then truly ready to live? Is your mind set on things above, or things on the earth? Are you so earthly minded you are no heavenly good?¹ Do you dismiss the glory of being with Christ? Do you downplay Paul's estimation of its value as "far better"? Think about that—do you doubt what Paul says, that being with Christ is far better? If so, you need to ponder this text more deeply.

2. Another possibility is that you are done with life and see no value in continuing in it. Do you want to leave now for Heaven and do you think it would be far better than your situation presently? I want you to stop and think also:

Are you so discontent with the setup in life that God has given you that you do not appreciate God's good gifts? Are you discouraged and not seeing the tremendous potential and value of life? Are you missing that in life there is a great opportunity to love God and serve others and love your neighbors and minister the saving gospel message to others? Where is your mindset—depressed, anxious, even suicidal, or joyful, resting, content? Are you letting God be God, or are you rebelling against Him? You need to ponder this text carefully, along with the book of Philippians as a whole. Leaving life prematurely is not a way to honor Christ.

Do you have Jesus in your life? If not, you will not see the value in it that Christians can see. If you are saved, have you lost sight of Christ?

Perhaps you are old and experiencing the frailties of advanced age. You are ready for God to take you home. That is OK. But you still have to be patient until God's time, because God gives and God takes away on His terms and at His time (Psalm 31:15). If He has you here still, He has appointed you to be here, and there are good reasons for it. Even if you do not understand

¹ I switched around the more common—but incorrect—human proverb.

what God is doing, you know you can honor God, praise Him, pray to Him, testify for Him, thank Him, and generally live for Him. Those things are reason enough to be here.

3. There are some among us who may look at both options with some negativity: staying here is bad, and leaving is also not desirable. That is the worst way to look at things. We pick life or death as if both are evil and we are picking the lesser of two evils.²

Life and death are not something we are indifferent about (as if we empty ourselves of all feelings like the eastern mystic). They are not even something we resign ourselves to. There is positive in both!

4. The best place in your head to be is where Paul was—stuck in the middle between the two blessed options. In that mindset, you are perfectly satisfied either way, trusting God to have you just where He wants you, satisfied to serve either here or in heaven. One is good, the other is even better, but not so much better that it wipes out the good of the present life. In fact, it is the blessedness of the Christian's future that makes the present so worthwhile to live. And, like Paul's situation, it may be more necessary for now that you stay here to carry on in that important work God has assigned you.

III. The More Needful Thing Currently, v. 24-26

A. As an apostle, Paul was privy to certain information from God that we are not. According to verse 24, he somehow knew that for him to remain in the flesh—to live on—was necessary. God had decreed him to stay alive for yet a while longer so that his work could be completed, particularly amongst the Philippians. Paul had confidence—he was convinced that his legal ordeal would turn out OK and he would be released so that he could continue his work.³

B. Remember, it was God who was working in the Philippians, He was going to complete that work (Phil. 1:6), and they were to

² Moule, *Philippian Studies*, p. 71.

³ It seems certain that after this point, however, he was a marked man and likely to be imprisoned again, as it seems to have turned out.

participate by “working out” their salvation (Phil. 2:12). And, as usual, God planned to use human means to carry on His work—in this case, the apostle Paul.

- C. Paul’s release would result in the progress and joy of faith for the Philippians. In other words, they would have joy that Paul was delivered back to them and not killed. Furthermore, they would be built up in the faith because of Paul’s continued ministry to them.
 - 1. Undoubtedly, also, a general joy would accompany their spiritual growth. Joy is characteristic of the Christian because we have so much about which to be joyful. A total of 14 verses in Philippians mention joy or rejoicing. In the New Testament, the count is 140 verses; it is over 450 for the entire Bible. If you are not joy-filled, something is off, but it *can* be repaired!
 - 2. The progress of faith entails increasing knowledge of God’s word and improved practice of godliness. Faith is a real-whole-life thing, not an academic or intellectual thing.
- D. We cannot say with such certainty that it is God’s plan for *us* to continue here for any length period of time. I like to think that God will not be done with me for a good long while, and that I have many years of fruitful ministry left—not merely because life is good, but because life is ministry, and ministry is good, and God is good, and I could use some more time in sanctification and an opportunity to gain some more reward for faithful service, and beside it is my duty as a child of God. Life and ministry is rich and full of great opportunities.

Conclusion

Like Paul, we can have a sense that as long as God is not ready to call us heavenward, we ought to have this mindset: to live is Christ, to minister for fruit, and to help other people grow in grace and joy in their faith. But when time comes to die, we can look forward to a far better situation.

And like the Philippian Christians, we can strive to make progress and growth in our faith and to continue in joy.