

Philippians 1:19-26

Over the past few weeks we've been looking at Paul's letter to the Philippians. While under house arrest in Rome he writes to them, expressing his thankfulness and prayer for them with joy. He knows of their concern and their prayers for him, and he wants to reassure them that he is well, and that he remembers them with joy. In fact Paul really wants to tell them not to worry or be anxious about his circumstances, instead he encourages them by telling them "that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel," (v12).

He explains this furtherance of the gospel in two ways. First, in verse 13 Paul writes, "it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ." The term palace guard refers to the Praetorian guard, 9,000 elite soldiers who protect the palace and the emperor. The message has spread among the guard, Paul is not a criminal, he is in prison because of Christ. Second, Paul writes, "most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear," (v15). Those who had been fearful because of Paul's arrest have now become bold and are preaching even more. Paul sees both of these as part of God's plan to spread the gospel. So Paul is rejoicing because Christ is being preached.

With this in mind, let's look at 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 knows (he is confident, sure, fully expect and hope) that his circumstances will turn out for good, for his deliverance. What does that deliverance look like? It may mean his release from prison, but it could mean his death, which he talks about in the following verses. His conviction is that whatever happens it will work for his good, his salvation. Paul would write in Romans 8:28 this same conviction, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

Reflection Question: In every situation you face, are you confident God is working for your good? Think of a time when this was true for you.

Why does Paul have such faith? Verse 19 gives us two reasons for this assurance. Paul believes in the power of prayer, and so he says, "through your prayer," the

Philippians who are praying that God will deliver him. Our prayers are important, because prayer touches God's heart. Paul knew he wasn't alone in this, so he mentions, "the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." The Holy Spirit working with the prayers of the church has greater impact than we can imagine.

Paul expresses his expectation and hope that he would never be ashamed of the gospel, but that he would always be bold, so that Christ would be magnified. To magnify something is to make it larger, to see it more clearly, to make God greater. At the end of verse 20, he says, "by life or by death." Here we have that anticipation I mentioned earlier. Paul did not know what would happen but he set his heart and mind to magnify God regardless of the circumstances.

Now we come to what I believe is the most important verse in today's passage. "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain," (v21). In this short sentence, Paul reveals the purpose of his life - "For me, to live is Christ." Christ is the one who gives meaning and purpose to our life, he gives us our identity, who we really are. For Paul, Christ is life, and to know Christ, to love and serve Him, to glorify Christ and proclaim Him, even to suffer for Him - that is life for Paul. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul states clearly how he sees his life, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me gave Himself for me," (2:20). Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." (John 14:6), and in John 15 he tells us to abide in Him. The testimony of the whole of the New Testament is telling us that life really is found in Christ and Him alone.

Reflection Question: Can you say, as Paul did, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." What does this mean to you? How does it affect the way you live?

In verses 22-24, Paul is debating whether it is better for him to live on in the flesh or to die and be with the Lord. If he remains in the flesh, there will be fruit from his labour, as others hear the gospel and grow in faith. If he goes to be with Christ it is for his personal gain and it is far better. Paul says he is hard pressed in verse 23, because his "desire is to depart and be with Christ, which is far better." Paul's attitude toward life and death is best explained as, wanting to go, but willing to stay. The attitude of a vast majority of people including many Christians is, wanting to stay, but willing to go. Paul chooses to remain and continue with them for their "progress and joy of faith," (v25).

I want to conclude this message with a true story. In 2007 Taliban terrorists kidnapped and held hostage 23 South Korean missionaries in Afghanistan. I won't go into the details of their ordeal, because their story is best told by how they felt during this time and what they experienced of the presence of Jesus. The hostages found out that they were going to be killed one at a time. Upon finding this out, two of the men started arguing.

One of the men said to the other, "Look, I know they are going to kill us one at a time. I die first."

The other man said, "No, I die first."

The first man responds, "No, I am your elder. I die first."

The other man says, “No, you have not been ordained as a pastor, I am an ordained minister. I die first.”

Indeed, the pastor was the first one that was executed.

What is really interesting is the response of those missionaries during their ordeal and when they got home. Several of them say they wish they were still captives of the Taliban. One said, “When I was surrounded by these soldiers, I felt the presence of Jesus in there with me. Now that we are back in Seoul, I am trying to experience that intimacy with Him but I can’t. I fast and pray and I don’t feel it. I would rather be back there because of the intimacy I had with Him.”

I believe these missionaries would agree with Paul, “*For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*” They found life in Christ, is a life of meaning and purpose, they found life in intimacy with Christ that made them ready to suffer and die, if that is what Christ called them too.

What about you? Do you know this life in Christ?