

Paul's Life Testimony

Philippians 1:18b-26

Online Sermon:

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While the Christian life is filled with a few glorious mountain tops to stand upon to review one's blessings and spiritual fruit, far too often one finds oneself in the trenches of trials, tribulations, and persecution. While one might be able to grudgingly become content in some of our bleak



circumstances, but is it possible to rejoice in the Lord when our pain is excruciating, long-term and will likely end in our own death? While the Bible teaches us our lives are like a vapor in the

wind, whom amongst us does not clamor to be healthy so that we might remain on this earth a little longer to enjoy the pleasures of eating ice cream, home cooked meals, skiing, boating, playing sports and hugging our loved ones? And yet while maximizing pleasure, minimizing pain and longevity are some of our most treasured goals how do they stack up against

Apostle Paul's infamous statement to the church of Philippi, "for to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (21)?

Living in a world where the primary focus is on "self" interests and pleasures and where euthanasia is sometimes the preferred option to a low quality of life, Paul's words, "be content whatever the circumstances," is not only counter cultural but rather alarming!

Paul, from a Roman prison facing likely execution, told the church of Philippi that what mattered most in his deep valley of persecution was not so much a release from prison but keeping "I" crucified with Christ so that his joy, words, thoughts, and deeds might be centered on the Source of his life and spiritual fruit! As I go through this sermon ask yourself where is your identity found, what is your source of joy, and are you content in the face of life or death because in either case you get to serve the Lord with all your heart, mind soul, and strength?

Assurance

Not only does Paul rejoice that his chains were being used to advance the Gospel message but also that whatever the

outcome of his trial “will turn out for his deliverance” (19)!¹ Although Paul does not indicate it, he is likely quoting Job 13:16² who contrary to what his accusers were stating, Job knew

FOR I KNOW
THIS SHALL TURN OUT
FOR MY DELIVERANCE
THROUGH YOUR PRAYERS
AND THE PROVISION
OF THE SPIRIT
OF JESUS CHRIST.
PHILIPPIANS 1:19

iniquity was not the cause of his suffering and upon closer examination by God knew he would be saved.³

Likewise Paul who “had been deprived of his freedom for the past five or so years, first in Caesarea, then in Malta (after the shipwreck), and now in Rome;”⁴ realized that in his affliction he too would find deliverance.⁵ While Paul is joyfully confident of his deliverance, he does not tell the reader what this word means to him. Even though Paul said, “I know” in verse 25 which seems to indicate he believed he would be released (delivered)

from prison this was not revealed to him by God⁶ but was merely the product of a faithful expectation.⁷ Paul was confident whether he was released from prison or not that whether by “life or death” (20) like Job upon “final deliverance of believers at the last judgment”⁸ he would be rescued from evil and stand vindicated before God!⁹ Paul believed his deliverance would come about through two different methods. First Paul did not rely on his “self-contained spiritual resources”¹⁰ but prayers from his Gospel partner the Philippians to help him not only work out his own salvation¹¹ as he boldly endured persecution. Due to the prayers of the churches such as Ephesus, Colossae, Thessalonica, and now Rome¹² Paul was able to replace his anxiety over any possible outcome of his pending trial whether it be life or death with the peace of God that surpasses all understanding (4:4-7)! Through their prayers Paul experienced the second means of his deliverance, the “sufficiency of the

¹ Frank Thielman, [Philippians](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 74.

² Clinton E. Arnold, [Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Romans to Philemon](#), vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 352–353.

³ Clinton E. Arnold, [Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Romans to Philemon](#), vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 353.

⁴ Paul Barnett, [Philippians & Philemon: Joy in the Lord](#), ed. Paul Barnett, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2016), 34.

⁵ Daniel M. Gurtner, “Philippians,” in [The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Acts–Philemon](#), ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2004), 576.

⁶ F. F. Bruce, [Philippians](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Peabody, MA: Baker Books, 2011), 48.

⁷ Frank Thielman, [Philippians](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 74.

⁸ R. Kent Hughes, [Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 56.

⁹ R. Kent Hughes, [Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 56.

¹⁰ R. Kent Hughes, [Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 56.

¹¹ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., [Philippians](#), The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 5.

¹² Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 66.

Spirit of Christ”¹³ Himself. While every believer is sealed by the Holy Spirit there are times in which one needs to “experience more of the Spirit’s fullness and power.”¹⁴

As Paul was chained to a guard in prison contemplating his fate he tells the Philippians he is rejoicing for their prayers are resulting in him having “fresh supplies of the Spirit of Jesus Christ being poured into his heart”¹⁵ which was securing his deliverance, whether in death or life.

Reflection

Do you see prayer as power and effective and as a result spend much of your time on your knees? When are you going through challenging times do you rely on the prayers of others and the sufficiency of the Spirit of Christ who lives inside you to help you endure your tribulation with joy? Whether you receive good or bad things in life do you rejoice in your citizenship being in heaven?

¹³ Tony Merida and Francis Chan, *Exalting Jesus in Philippians*, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 65.

¹⁴ R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 57.

¹⁵ R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 57.

¹⁶ Paul Barnett, *Philippians & Philemon: Joy in the Lord*, ed. Paul Barnett, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2016), 35.

Courageously Exalting Christ

As Paul faces an inevitable appearance in Caesar’s court he did so with a “well-founded twofold anticipation” of his future.¹⁶ Like creation’s “eager expectation for ultimate salvation” and the liberation from the bondage of decay (Romans 8:19-21),¹⁷ Paul eagerly awaited his trial for no matter he felt assured that Christ will be glorified in his body. Paul saw the “upcoming test in court as a divinely appointed opportunity to defend the gospel (Phil.



1:16) on his way to the final salvation he eagerly awaits.”¹⁸ “As shameful as imprisonment and execution were in the Roman world, that was not Paul’s concern.”¹⁹ Paul was eager to do was to get to and go through the trial without doing anything

¹⁷ Frank Thielman, *Philippians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 77.

¹⁸ Frank Thielman, *Philippians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 77.

¹⁹ G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 80.

unworthy or inconsistent with the proclamation of Jesus Christ and the Gospel message!²⁰ To this end through the prayers of the Philippians and God's provision of the Spirit of Christ Paul felt assured that in no way would he feel shame either of his words or deeds! He would not become "preoccupied with his own fate"²¹ and in doing so allow fear to have a grip on his heart. He knew he would have sufficient courage to fearlessly²² and boldly defend the Gospel message,²³ to those who worshipped the emperor and many gods, that there is but one way to become a citizen of heaven!

"Even though Paul expected a favorable outcome" (1:25), as with his chains, he felt overwhelmed with joy even if the verdict of the Roman court was a death sentence! In Paul's mind he was in a win/win scenario.

Should he be "released Christ would be magnified by a continuance of his apostolic ministry (cf. v. 24); if the verdict went against him, it would still be true that Christ would be

²⁰ F. F. Bruce, *Philippians*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Peabody, MA: Baker Books, 2011), 49.

²¹ Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 11, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 83.

²² F. F. Bruce, *Philippians*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Peabody, MA: Baker Books, 2011), 49.

²³ G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 80–81.

glorified in his martyrdom by his faithful witness unto death"²⁴ and he would stand before a heavenly tribunal in heaven fully vindicated.²⁵ What mattered to Paul most was that Christ would be preached (1:18) and exalted, to Asia Minor, Philippi, and now in the very heart of Rome!

Reflection

Do you often examine your words, thoughts, and deeds to see if they are honorable unto the Lord so that your light might shine profoundly when spreading the Good News? Are you afraid of death or are you like Apostle Paul and rejoice in meeting the Lord? If you were to go on trial for believing and speaking about the one and only God would your focus be on yourself and the outcome of the trial or on honouring Christ?

Life and Death Decisions

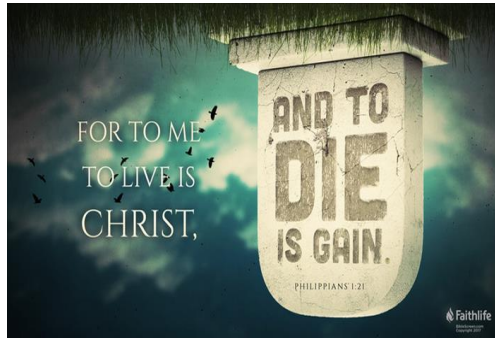
It is this point that Paul further reflected on why he felt life or death were both win/win scenarios.²⁶ Despite the intense

²⁴ Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 11, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 83.

²⁵ Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians*, vol. 11, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 70.

²⁶ Tony Merida and Francis Chan, *Exalting Jesus in Philippians*, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 69.

pain of bearing the chains of persecution and possible execution,²⁷ Paul was not “weighed down by these well-nigh unbearable burdens”²⁸ but instead boldly and joyfully stated,



“for me to live is Christ and to die is gain” (21). While some Greeks saw death “gain” or blessing when it relieved intense suffering,²⁹ though Paul saw death as the final enemy (1

Corinthians 15:26)³⁰ his view on suffering and persecution was that he considered “everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus” (3:8).³¹ This is why Paul felt that to die was gain for it was only then that he would become sinless,³² finish the race, and win the prize or goal of his life (1

Corinthians 9:24-27), to be fully in in the presence of the Lord.³³ Also, Paul’s death for defending the Gospel message would be “would be his final and most effective witness for Christ!”³⁴

If Paul was released from prison after the trial then this too would be a gain because “his present, bodily, earthly existence is completely permeated by Christ.”³⁵ This is why Paul told the church of Galatia, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (2:20).³⁶

²⁷ G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 83.

²⁸ G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 83.

²⁹ Daniel M. Gurtner, “[Philippians](#),” in *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Acts–Philemon*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2004), 577.

³⁰ Paul Barnett, [Philippians & Philemon: Joy in the Lord](#), ed. Paul Barnett, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2016), 37.

³¹ G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 82.

³² R. Kent Hughes, [Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 59.

³³ G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 83.

³⁴ G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 83.

³⁵ G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 82.

³⁶ R. Kent Hughes, [Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 59.

The very “foundation, center, purpose, direction, power, and meaning”³⁷ of Paul’s life was found in Christ who alone enabled him to preach the Good News and bear much fruit! When Paul finished this section by stating he is torn between both life and death he was not suggesting that he had a choice in the matter but merely that in considering both possible outcomes of his upcoming trial as long as he remained faithful to Christ he would “win” in the sense of meeting his goal, exalting Christ!

Reflection

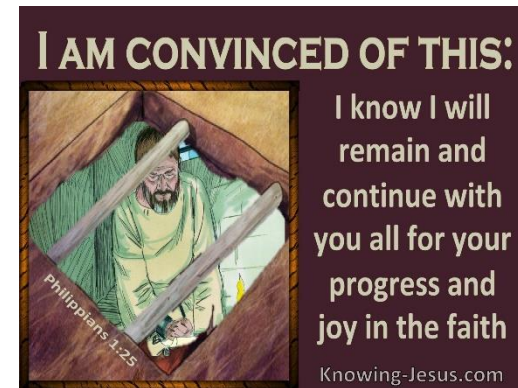
What does “to live” mean to you? Does it mean to golf, to work, to gain wealth or reputation or like Apostle Paul are your goals found only in honoring your Lord? Is your life so comfortable here on this earth that your desire is to live, in a place that is not your home, as long as humanly possible? Have you crucified the “I” in your life so that Christ might reign fully in your life? If Christ called you to suffer like he did Paul greatly for His name’s sake would you drown in your own self-pity and pray for death to come quickly or would you rejoice in the incredible witness your faith in suffering has on the lost?

³⁷ G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 81.

³⁸ Roger Ellsworth, [Opening up Philippians](#), Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2004), 27–28.

A Living Testimony

Even though death and being with Christ is far “better than the best of life”³⁸ Paul sated he knew and was convinced and knew that he would be released from prison to return to



Philippi for their “progress and joy in the faith” (1:25). What was the basis of Paul’s statement, “I know I will remain”? Some commentators suggest Paul’s sudden confidence in being released from prison was possibly due to

“special revelation from God”³⁹ through meditation.⁴⁰ Others suggest that upon reflection Paul remembered it was Seneca, Nero’s speechwriter and chief advisor, who was likely to preside over the court hearings⁴¹ and since he had made a favorable decision for Paul in Corinth a decade earlier concerning his

³⁹ Homer A. Kent Jr., [“Philippians,”](#) in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 116.

⁴⁰ Ralph P. Martin, [Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 11, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 87.

⁴¹ Paul Barnett, [Philippians & Philemon: Joy in the Lord](#), ed. Paul Barnett, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2016), 38.

proclamation of the Gospel, he would do so again.⁴² The basis of Paul's confidence of his release is not known and considering that Paul hints that he might be martyred later in the letter in 2:17 it is likely his "I know" is really "I hope for" being released.⁴³ Either way this does not change the fact that Paul who deeply longed to be face to face "was subordinated to what was best for his converts!"⁴⁴

By exhibiting the "self-emptying, self-humbling character of Christ" (2:6-8)⁴⁵ Paul was modeling to church who were grumbling and having leadership fights the solution to disunity, "serving the community outweighs individual desires!"⁴⁶

If Paul's "calculation of probabilities"⁴⁷ is right and he is released from prison that would mean their progress and joy in the faith and their boasting in Christ Jesus would abound even

⁴² Paul Barnett, [Philippians & Philemon: Joy in the Lord](#), ed. Paul Barnett, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2016), 38.

⁴³ Ralph P. Martin, [Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 11, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 87.

⁴⁴ R. Kent Hughes, [Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 61.

⁴⁵ G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 90.

more! The evidence from the Pastoral Epistles and early historical testimony suggests that Paul was indeed released from his first Roman imprisonment only later to be reimprisoned to suffer a martyr's death.⁴⁸ If this is true then imagine how much of an impact Paul's return to Philippi would have made on their unity and profound faith to fearlessly proclaim the Gospel message!

Reflection

Paul stated that while he rejoiced in the possibility of dying and being with Christ he found it necessary to remain in the body so that he might aid others in the progress and joy of their faith. When you think about your frail body and inevitable suffering in older age do you feel it is necessary to remain in the church⁴⁹ or are you praying for your quick demise? Are you using your spiritual gifts and if so do you realize you will be missed but will also have an effect on the church? Are you serving to gain a reputation or are you being like Paul and put others first so that

⁴⁶ G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 90.

⁴⁷ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., [Philippians](#), The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 6.

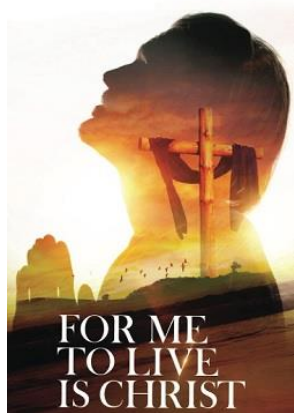
⁴⁸ Homer A. Kent Jr., "[Philippians](#)," in [The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon](#), ed. Frank E. Gaebelien, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 116.

⁴⁹ Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 71.

all can grow in their confidence in Christ and boast in His name? As you face likely death are you rejoicing that you are about to go home and be with the Lord?

Conclusion

Like Apostle Paul we unlikely know the day or the hour of our death and subsequent journey to eternally be with our Lord. Living in a fallen world that is subject to continuous decay often means that we will experience suffering and pain that will be so intense that we will look for any way out of our dire circumstances. While euthanasia is slowly becoming the preferred option to ending a low quality of life



Paul states there is a much better God-honouring way to handle intense suffering and pain. Feeling unspeakable joy and rejoicing in life is not to be a by-product of either standing on a glorious mountain top of blessings or crawling in the trenches of trails, tribulations, and persecution; but like Paul is to be found living his Spirit inspired words, “for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain!” This means going against our culture who often believe that the goal of life is to glorify self by maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain. Is not the summary of all Scripture to love God and one another? Since this is the case then should not our overarching goal in life be in Apostle Paul’s words, “do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value other above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but

each of you to the interests of others” (2:3-4)? For this to happen the “I” in our identity must be “crucified with Christ so “that we might “live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

Being persecuted and facing likely execution Paul told the Philippians his innermost desire was to depart and be with Christ but for the sake of their progress and joy in the faith he would gladly continue life in the trenches of suffering, pain, and persecution so that they and he might boast in the Lord!

While we often do not get to choose the circumstances of our lives, we can choose to whom we will serve, ourselves or others and the Lord!