

# Paul's Letter to the Philippians

Session Three April 8, 2020

Philippians 1:18b-26

Paul spends a brief time in his letters to the Philippians reflecting on his ministry and his present situation – whether it will continue or will result in his life being taken from him.

In one of the few letters in the New Testament, Paul begins to address what he believes happens between the bodily death of a Christian and the bodily resurrection – being in the presence of Jesus Christ.

## Opening Question:

**What loss have you grieved, either recent or from long ago, and how is God walking with you through it?**

Paul is uncertain about his future, and he is openly sharing this with the Philippians church. He has shared at the beginning of Chapter 1 that he is going to send Timothy, and many scholars believed that he is probably going to wait on the verdict of his trial before he sends Timothy with the news.

In these few verses we are going to focus on tonight, he lays out his thoughts on the possible outcomes – life or death. These are not abstract thoughts for Paul – this is real life. But for both, as we will see for Paul, they are both gains for Christ and for Paul! To live or die, the Messiah will be glorified!

However, Paul in Philippians (later on) and in multiple other letters does not feel ashamed about feeling grief about his own death or death of others. N.T. Wright shares a growing sentiment in Western Christianity since the 19<sup>th</sup> century that as Christians we are called to be “cheerful” about death! Paul would argue, and does in this letter and other letters, that its natural to grieve in death, but not to forget the gain in death as well. That is what Paul discusses in these verses in Philippians chapter 1.

Paul picks up the conversation about rejoicing that Christ is being proclaimed – whether in truth or false pretense – while he is in prison.

## **Vs. 19 – 20 – Paul quotes from the Old Testament to relate to the present.**

*“Turn out for my deliverance”* – Paul quotes from Job 13:15-18, quoting only a few words, but alluding to a larger passage where Job is suffering mightily from a host of issues. His friends arrive to bring comfort, yet blame him for all the struggles that have come his way – basically he deserves what he has gotten! Paul identifies with Job in his present situation, and sees these other individuals stirring up trouble for him while he is in prison as Job’s friends.

He encourages the Philippians to continue to lift him up in prayer, and that in the end, he will be “rescued” – the word used here literally means by salvation – through the prayer and support of the Spirit of Christ! Paul will not be put to shame, like Job’s friends tried to do to him.

For Paul, this is either in life or death...

*This is something I think we can hold on to today – prayers of others and the support of the Holy Spirit working in and through them!*

### **Vs. 21 - 24 - To Live is Christ and to Die is Gain!**

For Paul, to live meant to continue to spread the message of Christ to others. To continue to mentor churches, like the church at Philippi. In verse 22, he uses the imagery of “fruitful labor” again – his life’s work was to win others to Christ and to start faithful communities of believers to continue to spread the message of Christ. Yet, Paul knew that even if his time on earth was over, that message would continue to be done through the Spirit of Christ and through the faithful believers in the churches like Philippi.

Paul, however, did not have a death wish. He was being honest and vulnerable with a community he could be honest with. In verse 23, he recognizes that if it is time and the verdict is death, he knows that it means being in the presence of Christ, and that is much better.

Paul will talk about death more in chapter 3, but he touches on his belief that a Christian believer when he or she dies, is immediately in the presence of Jesus Christ. There was no waiting for the bodily resurrection, no eternal slumber. Paul believed that being in the presence of Christ was the reward for the death of a believer. This was the gain. We will touch on this more in chapter 3.

In verse 24, Paul recognizes the importance of being present for the Philippian church and for their continued growth.

### **Vs. 25 – 26 – Paul believes that He will still be around!**

God’s ultimate plan – Philippian church “progress” and “joy” in the faith – Paul believes that God is still using him to continue to see the Philippians grow in their faith. The partnership/koinonia between Paul and the Philippian church will continue to grow and their confidence in Jesus Christ will continue to grow. God is finished with Paul on earth yet!

*Follow Up Questions...*

*What fruitful work does the Lord have for you to do – in your home, work, neighborhood, etc., in this unique time?*

*How does Paul's outlook on life and death challenge our own sense of the value, dignity, and importance of life with Christ in body?*