

As we look at our text for today, let us remember that the Apostle Paul is in prison with a possible death sentence hanging over his head. Later in the letter, he will tell them to always dwell on what is good and to always rejoice. (4:8) In our passage today and throughout this letter, Paul is practicing what he preaches. He could complain about his condition, but instead he sees the good and rejoices. Last week we read how he saw his imprisonment as an opportunity to reach the palace guard. In our current passage, he is certain of his deliverance because of the prayers of the Philippian church, but he's not so sure that is what he personally wants as we'll see in the text.

18b Yes, and I will rejoice, 19 for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, How did Paul know? A few verses later he tells us that it is because the Philippian church needs more instruction from him. He had a sense that his work was not done. It's hard to explain, but something deep within says our mission is not completed.

Several military leaders had that sense. They would even stand on a front line and observe a battle with bullets whizzing by while they barked out orders. They knew they wouldn't be hit. How? They just knew in their knower they weren't done.

We are in a spiritual battle. This is a war that is as real as, and even more important than, one with bullets and bombs. (Ephesians 6:12) It is war for the souls of men. His servants often have sense of duty yet to fulfill and sometimes even a sense of when the job is done and they are ready to go. (2Timothy 4:7)

Paul knew that the Father had heard the Philippians' prayers and that the Spirit of Jesus Christ was going to see him freed to finish his work. We don't have a record of exactly how that all came about, but we do know that he was freed. At a later time, when his mission was complete, he would be tried, condemned as an enemy of the state, and beheaded. That just means an even greater deliverance (same word used for salvation).

There are so many times when we feel someone has gone too soon. We almost always feel that way, regardless of their age. But the Scriptures tell us that our times are in God's hands. (Psalm 31:15) Two weeks ago a 13 year old boy was hit in the chest by a pitcher's ball and died. That pitcher's niece had died a week before of an asthma attack. We live in a fallen world, but we have this assurance, our days are numbered by the Lord of all. **Though we most likely don't understand the whys, we do know His heart.** He sees all, including the future. He knows when it is time to call a soul home and when we must linger here a little longer. Every day of our life was written in his book

Commented [Paul1]: Philippians 4:8 (ESV)

⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Commented [Paul2]: Ephesians 6:12 (ESV)

¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Commented [Paul3]: 2 Timothy 4:7 (ESV)

⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

Commented [Paul4]: Psalm 31:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ My times are in your hand; rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors!

before we came to be. (Psalm 139:16) We can trust that His decisions come from His loving heart.

Paul's rejoicing was not that he would escape death, but rather that he had more opportunity to serve his Lord and Savior. Do you share that same passion?

²⁰ as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. What an expression of faith and confidence in the Lord's strength and faithfulness. Paul eagerly expected that Christ would be honored in his body whether in living or in his dying. Unlike Peter's self-confidence that he would never betray the Lord (Matthew 26:33), Paul had confidence in the enabling power of the Spirit of Jesus to help him to live or die in a way that would glorify God.

Notice how he words this, "always Christ will be honored in my body". He had written to the Romans to present their bodies as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1) and to dedicate the members of their bodies to God as instruments of righteousness. (Romans 6:13) I believe he means that his mouth might honor God in his speech, that his feet may take him to where the church needs to be strengthened or where the gospel has not yet been heard, or even that as the lions devour his body in the arena that he might confidently look to God and praise him as a witness to the spectators. No wonder he prefaces that remark, "with full courage"!

We are often so weak in faith that we just pray that we won't be a bad example. How much better to eagerly expect and confidently hope that we will not be *at all* ashamed but that with full courage today and always that Christ will be honored in our body, whether by life or by death! If we are a little further along spiritually, we might just hope that would be the case. But if we have seen God do it again and again, if we know His power to enable and use us for his glory, then we have that eager expectation, along with the confident hope, that He will enable us to honor Him again. (1Samuel 17:36) That doesn't just happen on its own. We must cooperate with the Spirit and allow Him to have His way in us. He'll provide the power and direction if we will yield to his Spirit.

He could eagerly expect to glorify God in life or death because, as he stated it, *²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* Many years before, he had encountered Christ on the road to Damascus. (Acts 9:3-6) He came to realize that all his efforts to serve and please God were not only garbage (3:8), but were achieving the opposite effect of what he hoped. That is humbling. In fact, it was this intense realization that he was incapable to doing anything for God that brought him to Jesus and an utter death to his old life. He went to the cross and died with Jesus.

Commented [Paul5]: Psalm 139:16 (ESV)

¹⁶Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

Commented [Paul6]: Matthew 26:33 (ESV)

³³Peter answered him, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away."

Commented [Paul7]: Romans 12:1 (ESV)

¹I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Commented [Paul8]: Romans 6:13 (ESV)

¹³Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.

Commented [Paul9]: 1 Samuel 17:36 (ESV)

³⁶Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God."

Commented [Paul10]: Acts 9:3-5 (ESV)

³Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" ⁵And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

Commented [Paul11]: Philippians 3:8 (ESV)

⁸Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ

Listen to how he states it in his letter to the Galatians. ²⁰ *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* Galatians 2:20 (ESV)

The old religious Paul that thought that by keeping the Law he could please God was crucified with Jesus on the cross. It is a point to which every believer in Jesus must come. It is a realization that each one of must face. Without Jesus, we can do nothing! (John 15:5) **If we do anything that truly glorifies God, it is because we died with Jesus and He now lives in us. (2Timothy 2:11) We operate in this body by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us. His life in us is the enabling power for these physical bodies to live in a way that honors God. (Colossians 1:9-10)**

Therefore, Paul could say "to live is Christ." Every day was about Jesus. Every day was under His direction, living in Him and He in Paul. **If to us to live is Christ, then we will eagerly expect to glorify God in our body,** come what may. Not because we are so super spiritual, on the contrary, because we died and the life that we now live we live by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us! To live is Christ! That gives us a reason to look forward to every single day. It gives me confidence to face the trials of life, because it isn't me facing them alone, but Christ facing them in me.

That also gives me hope of being fruitful. ²² *If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me.* If God wills for me to keep on living, regardless of my physical abilities, since for me to live is Christ, then this day's labor will be fruitful. I may be bedridden, I may be handicapped, I may be as healthy as can be; it doesn't matter. What matters is that we are living in Christ. How can He be anything but fruitful? **If Christ is our life, it is guaranteed that we will be fruitful.** And that guarantee is not because I have figured out the right program or method, but because for me to live is Christ. The life I live in this body that is surrendered to Him, I live by faith in Him. I trust Him, look to Him, rely upon Him, depend on Him and love Him. How can that not mean anything but fruitful labor for me?

Sometimes we worry about whether or not we have found our calling or if we are living in our purpose. It's good to examine your faith (2Corinthians 13:5), but here is the answer to our question. Live in Jesus. Let *Him* be your life. Then your calling will come about naturally and your purpose, which is His purpose, will flow from your life and not be forced against your own desires. So Paul was saying that if God answers their prayers and he is not condemned to death then he has more opportunity to live daily in Christ which is guaranteed fruitfulness. That honors God, and that is Paul's heart, to

Commented [Paul12]: ⁵ *I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.* John 15:5 (ESV)

Commented [Paul13]: 2 Timothy 2:11 (ESV)
¹¹ The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him;

Commented [Paul14]: Colossians 1:9-10 (ESV)
⁹ And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.
¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

Commented [Paul15]: 2 Corinthians 13:5 (ESV)
⁵ Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!

honor God. He'll have more opportunities to lay up his treasures in heaven. (Matthew 6:20)

Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. It's a tough call. Paul had a supernatural glimpse of the third heaven. (2Corinthians 12:3-4) He's seen Jesus in His glory. He knows what he has to look forward to. (2Timothy 4:6-8) He knows the work in him will be completed when he sees Jesus face to face. Even though to live is Christ, it isn't easy. Stoning, scourgings, shipwrecks, beatings and the like make you long for heaven. Even worse, betrayals and personal attacks make us long for the comfort we'll receive in heaven where every tear will be wiped from our eyes. (Isaiah 25:8) There will be no more failing Him then. It is indeed a tough call between remaining and being fruitful in a way that honors God and blesses His people, or going to see Him face to face.

I haven't suffered hardly anything compared to Paul but my desire has often been to depart and be with Christ. It is far better. Haven't you thought so at times? As I watch the elderly age, I see the same effect. God allows us to age so that as these bodies get more and more difficult to live in we begin to long for heaven. We know it is far better.

And notice that for Paul, heaven is to be with Christ. He lives in Him now, but as Paul wrote in another place, then we will know as we are known. (1Corinthians 13:12) We will see Him face to face. I long to look into those eyes and hold those feet. Mary Magdalene was told not to cling to His feet because He had not yet ascended to the Father. (John 20:17) Well, there will be no problem then. We can hold them as long as we desire and gaze at those holes that forever declare our debt is paid. I am loved. I'm accepted. Thanks be to God.

Paul adds, ²⁴ *But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.* Paul would choose the sword or the lion as his ticket home, but he knows his job isn't finished. There is a need that he is meant to fill and it has to do with the Philippian church. He prays for them, writes instruction, and sends encouraging teachers to help them, and perhaps will even have a chance to visit them in person. He puts their need above his own heart's longing. What an example for the "me first" church of today!

²⁵ *Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith,* He was convinced that it was God's will for him to live and remain in touch with them. His first reason for doing so is for their progress in the faith. They needed to mature more so that they could continue in a good direction. We'll see in chapter four that there is some conflict in the church that needed to be resolved. Part of that progress is learning to work together in spite of differences, to let go of offenses

Commented [Paul16]: Matthew 6:20 (ESV)

²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

Commented [Paul17]: 2 Corinthians 12:3-4 (ESV)

³ And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—

⁴ and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter.

Commented [Paul18]: 2 Timothy 4:6-8 (ESV)

⁶ For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.

⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

⁸ Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

Commented [Paul19]: Isaiah 25:8 (ESV)

⁸ He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.

Commented [Paul20]: 1 Corinthians 13:12 (ESV)

¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

Commented [Paul21]: John 20:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

and recognize that we are not competing but serving for the same cause. It is also to humbly consider others better than ourselves. (2:3) Conflict in the church is meant to strengthen and shape us if we will endure it and not run from it.

Commented [Paul22]: Philippians 2:3 (ESV)

³ Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

Paul's remaining in this life was also for their joy in the faith. This letter mentions joy more frequently in four chapters than any other portion of Scripture. Joy is condition of the soul that is confident in its place in the love of God. It is not related to circumstances. A Spirit filled church is a joyful church. (4:4) Our convictions in regard to who Jesus is and what He has done for us should fill us with great joy. That is our joy in the faith.

Commented [Paul23]: Philippians 4:4 (ESV)

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

Paul wanted to remain for their progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ *so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.* He knew that when he visited them again, they would find reason in the rich insights Paul had of Jesus to glory in Christ Jesus. The more they saw of Jesus, the more they would glory in Him.

Someone asked how to help a loved one not be seduced away from the faith. There is only one answer. Know Jesus! Learn more of Him. Surrender your life to Him. Discover how much you are loved. Live in Him and let Him live in you. Once you experience a real and living relationship with Him, every other religion has nothing substantial to offer. Whether we live or die we are the Lord's and He is ours.

There are two issues that I want you to consider as we close this message. First I would ask the believer, "Can you say with the Apostle, to live is Christ and to die is gain?" Is your life really about Christ or all about you? Have you been crucified with Jesus or is your old life still alive and well? To believe in Jesus is not just an intellectual acceptance, but a surrender of the heart. It is to accept Him as your Lord and to make Him your life.

To the unbeliever I ask? Do you know where you are going and what awaits you? Are you looking forward to it? For you, what is living? When you come to the end will it be worth it? You can find the One the makes life worthwhile and know death to be gain if you will surrender your life to the One who loves you and gave Himself for you.

Questions

- 1 Why did Paul think he would be delivered?
- 2 How can we find comfort when a loved one dies?
- 3 Where was Paul's confidence placed?
- 4 What was his eager expectation?
- 5 How can we live in a way that honors God?

- 6 Why can we look forward to each day?
- 7 Why may Paul have longed for death?
- 8 What is heaven to Paul?
- 9 Why must Paul remain?
- 10 How can we grow firmly in the faith?