A Study of the Book of Philippians

Finding Joy in Living or Dying (Philippians 1:18b-26)

“It is either all of Christ or none of Christ! I believe we need to preach again a whole Christ to the world - a Christ who does not need our apologies, a Christ who will not be divided, a Christ who will either be Lord of all or will not be Lord at all!”

~ A. W. Tozer

I. Overview

Throughout history, men and women have sought to prolong life and circumvent death. And yet, the apostle Paul’s outlook on life and death vastly differs from such thinking. Rather than seeking the “fountain of youth,” Paul recognizes the beauty of life and death when rooted in Christ. Regardless of life’s circumstances, Paul’s focus is Christ—and in Him alone, Paul finds great joy!

II. Rejoicing in His Deliverance (1:18b-26)

A. The Reasons Why Paul can Rejoice (1:18b-20)

v. 18b - Paul concluded the previous section by rejoicing in his present state. The apostle now turns to rejoicing in whatever lies before him. Despite the uncertainties which he himself recognizes in verses 20-24, Paul rests securely in what he does know (see vv. 19, 25).

vv. 19-20 - Paul identifies two reasons why he is rejoicing:

- **Paul’s joy is found in his deliverance.** Several commentators argue that Paul is referring to an eschatological deliverance. One of the major arguments for this view is that the term for “deliverance” is usually used by Paul to refer to the final deliverance of the believer at the last judgment (see Rom 1:16; 10:10; 2 Cor 7:10; Phil 1:28). However, the term can refer to “vindication”. If this is the case, then Paul “hopes that his trust in God will be honored and his witness to divine faithfulness will be attested by the turn of events” (Martin, *Philippians, 1976*). Further support for this interpretation is the reference to Job 13:16 in verse 19. Similar to Job, Paul looks to vindication for all the misunderstandings surrounding his sufferings. Another reason for viewing this “deliverance” as a court acquittal is Paul’s confidence that he would see the believers soon in 2:24.

Note that the apostle Paul identifies two ways in which his deliverance is possible:

1. **Via the prayers of the saints.** Paul asks the believers to pray for him. “Whenever Paul asks the church to pray for him, it is that he might be delivered from disobedience and even men (Rom 15:30-31; 2 Thess 3:2), that he might be released from prison and brought safely again to his friends (Philem 22), that he might remain
true to God in the face of opposition (2 Cor 1:9-11; 1 Thess 5:25), and that his ministry might be effective (Col 4:3; 2 Thess 3:1-2)” (Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 40).

2. *Via the assistance of the Holy Spirit.* Paul acknowledges the extreme importance of the Spirit’s work in assisting him in the midst of adversity (Lk 12:12).

- *Paul’s joy is found in his willingness to be bold as he exalts Christ.* The first part of verse 20 could be translated as “my hope-filled eager expectation”. Paul’s boldness resides in knowing that God’s purposes cannot be altered. He recognizes that the power of God is found in the gospel (see Rom 1:16 and 2 Cor 3:12). Paul’s focus on Christ and the opportunity to preach the Good News eliminated his concern in whatever the future might hold (see 1 Cor 6:19-20).

Note that Paul switches the subject to Christ. “Paul is simply the instrument by which the greatness of Christ shines out” (O’Brien, *Philippians*, 115).

### B. The Reason Why Paul Serves (1:21-26)

v. 21 - Paul does not provide a long discourse in all that he has endured. Nor is there an interest in his present state. Rather, Paul’s entire focus centers on Christ. This mission statement guides Paul’s outlook on life and death. Observe the following:

- **Paul’s profession = glorify Christ (Phil 1:21-24)**
  - ... in life
    - Life means Christ (Rom 14:7-9). Life affords the opportunity to exalt Christ on earth (v. 21).
    - Life grants an opportunity for more productive work (v. 22).
    - Life allows Paul to be with the Philippian believers (v. 24).
    - Life is more advantageous for the Philippians.
  - ... in death
    - Death means fellowship with Christ. Death affords the opportunity to exalt Christ in Heaven (v. 21).
    - Death grants rest from work (v. 22).
    - Death allows Paul to be with Christ (v. 23).
    - Death is more advantageous for Paul.
Summary from verses 21-24:

- Christ is “the object, motive, inspiration, and goal of all that the apostle does (cf. Gal 2:20)” (O’Brien, 120).

- Paul does NOT desire death for the purpose of escaping the trials and pressures of life, but rather, Paul views death as a means of granting greater fellowship with Christ.

- Paul is guided by his love for others rather than by his personal desires (see 2:4).

- Ultimately, Paul is obedient to wherever the Lord might have him.

v. 25 - Paul returns to what he does know, that is, he has been called by God to be an apostle. The Lord made this decision, not Paul (see Acts 9:15-16).

Paul's purpose for living is expressed in the latter part of this verse. His presence assists in their progress in the Christian faith—a progress marked by joy.

v. 26 - The second purpose for Paul's presence is so that the Philippian believers can boast of Christ because of Paul. As aptly noted by one commentator, “If God is pleased to grant it, then the ground of the Philippians’ rejoicing would be the apostle, not imprisoned in some distant cell, but with them again, ministering to their needs and inspiring them as in days gone by” (O’Brien, 141).

III. Intersect

A. Our prayer should always be that we are seeking to be obedient to the Lord’s will.

Ephesians 3:14-21 -

“It is a wonderful comfort, a marvelous boost to faith, to know that you are praying in line with the declared will of the almighty God.”

- D. A. Carson, A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers, 200

B. We should pray and expect the Holy Spirit to work mightily among His people.

James 5:17-18 -

“Too much of our praying is perfunctory, even lackadaisical. It lacks real seriousness, genuine desire and fervent longing.”

- Ivan H. French, Principles and Practice of Prayer, 119
C. Our prayer life needs to recognize that service to Christ is the goal in both life and death.

1 Corinthians 1:4-9 -

D. A. Carson asks a very important question in his book on Paul’s prayers: “Has God become so central to all our thoughts and pursuits, and thus to our praying, that we cannot easily imagine asking for anything without consciously longing that the answer bring glory to God?” (p. 203)

For further thought . . .

Based upon our study this morning, you may want to spend some additional time this week interacting with the following:

In a recent article by New York Times Bestselling Author, Andy Andrews, he challenges individuals to write a personal mission statement. He argues that “once you declare your mission statement, you begin living it.” For the apostle Paul, his mission statement is clearly defined in Philippians 1:21: “For me to live is Christ, to die is gain.” His statement is succinct, clear, and memorable.

Do you have a personal mission statement? If not, take some time to think through what principles should govern your life. Questions you might want to ask yourself are: What should you value most? How do you wish to be known? Devote some time in prayer and seeking wise counsel and godly feedback as you lay out your personal mission statement.

If you have a personal mission statement, assess your mission in light of Paul’s statement in Philippians 1. Are there any areas of your personal mission statement that need to be rewritten? If your statement is biblically solid, then spend some time assessing how your daily routine is faring in light of this statement. Are there any areas of your life that need some “fine-tuning”? If so, what specific steps do you need to take?

"To forsake Christ for the world, is to leave a treasure for a trifle . . . eternity for a moment, reality for a shadow." ~ William Jenkyn, Puritan Minister

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