

PHILIPPIANS

LESSON FOUR

JOY IN BEING WITH THE LORD

(1:21-26)

Overview

- I. The Context
 - A. Paul is in prison for preaching the Gospel of Christ
 - B. His imprisonment would end in one of two ways – his death or his release
 - C. Either way, Paul could find joy

- II. Paul's Desire Was to Glorify Christ
 - A. In 1:20, Paul stated that this was his “earnest expectation”
 - B. He declared that he could do this by life or by death
 - C. His concern was not for himself, but for the preaching of the Gospel, the work of the church and the glory of God.
 - D. This is how he could find joy in any and every situation

- III. Paul's Dilemma Was to Live or Die
 - A. This seems like such an easy choice
 - B. However, Paul said that he was in a difficult position because of this choice *{Paul knows that he does not really choose – God is in control}*
 - C. If he continued living
 1. He would magnify Christ
 2. He would have a fruitful labor
 3. He would help the brethren
 - D. If he died
 1. He would gain the victory
 2. He would be with Christ
 3. He would become a martyr
 - E. Selfishly, Paul would welcome death; but, since he knows the good he can do in this life, he also welcomes life and release from prison

- IV. Paul's Determination Was to Help the Church
 - A. He knew that his presence and work was needed by the church
 - B. His release from prison and being spared death would help to progress their joy of faith and rejoicing
 - C. Thus, it would remind them of the importance of being in Christ – for that is the only source of true joy

- V. Lessons
 - A. To live is Christ – *What does the world see in you?*
 - B. To die is gain – *How attached to this world are you?*
 - C. To glorify God is everything

Philippians 1:21-26 (ASV)

21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

22 But if to live in the flesh, --if this shall bring fruit from my work, then what I shall choose I know not.

23 But I am in a strait betwixt the two, having the desire to depart and be with Christ; for it is very far better:

24 yet to abide in the flesh is more needful for your sake.

25 And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide, yea, and abide with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith;

26 that your glorying may abound in Christ Jesus in me through my presence with you again.

Philippians 1:21-26 (ESV)

21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

22 If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. 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.

24 But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your 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.

1:21 **For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain**

- A. The phrase “to me” is emphatic in the Greek.
 - 1. Paul means that no matter what others may live for, to him, living is Christ.
 - 2. Many live for the things of this life – money, power, pleasure, recreation.
 - 3. To Paul, there is only one thing worth living for – Jesus.
- B. Literally, Paul says, “the living is Christ.”
 - 1. Vincent wrote: “He has no thought of life apart from Christ.”
 - 2. Robertson wrote: “Living is coextensive with Christ.”
 - 3. David Lipscomb wrote: “To exalt and glorify Christ was his only incentive in life.”
 - 4. Paul wrote: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me...” (Galatians 2:20).
- C. If one’s life is Christ, death is gain.
 - 1. The word “gain” refers to profit, interest on an investment or an advantage (cf. 3:7; Titus 1:11).
 - 2. Death is a victory for the Christian, for he goes to be with the Lord (1:23; 2 Corinthians 5:1-8).
- D. Thus, we have Paul’s view of life and death.
 - 1. Because he wrote by inspiration, this is also God’s view of these matters – and, it should be ours.
 - 2. Life is an opportunity to serve and glorify God.
 - 3. Death is a release from suffering and a welcome to eternal bliss.

1:22 **But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labor: yet what I shall choose I wot not**

- A. Brother Robert Taylor wrote that Paul “faced a momentous choice and it was not a moral one between right and wrong but one between what was better for Christ and what was better for Paul.”
- B. If continued life meant more fruit – more opportunities to serve the Lord and his fellowman – then Paul faced a dilemma.
- C. In fact, Paul would not declare his preference.

1:23 **For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better**

- A. Personally, he desired to leave this world and go to be with Christ.
- B. In fact, Paul knew that being with the Lord was far better than being confined to a prison cell and suffering in this life.
 - 1. Literally, Paul says that it is much more better or very far better.
 - 2. There is an emphasis here that the English language does not convey very well.
- C. This does not mean that Paul did not value this life or that he was suicidal.
- D. However, he so fully understood the joy of being with the Lord that he was in a “strait betwixt two.”
 - 1. Literally, Paul was being pressed from both sides.
 - 2. He was held together or hemmed in by the two choices (cf. Luke 8:45).

- E. The word “depart” literally means “to unloose.”
 1. It was often used of a ship untying from a dock in preparation for sailing.
 2. It meant to weigh anchor and put out to sea or to break up camp.
 3. Thus, for the Christian, death is not an end, but the beginning of a new journey.

1:24 **Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you**

- A. As much as he wanted to be with the Lord, Paul also recognized the good he could accomplish in this life.
- B. He knew that his abiding in the flesh would be a help to the church.
- C. Thus, Paul’s choice was between his personal wishes and what was best for others.

1:25 **And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith**

- A. Again, Brother Taylor wrote that the choice “is one we have learned to expect from Paul – Christ and others are first and second with Paul a distant third in the matter of priorities.”
- B. Paul’s confidence was in the Lord and that He would do what was best.
- C. Thus, Paul expected to continue in his life and work for the kingdom.
- D. The word “furtherance” hearkens back to verse 12.
 1. The things that had happened to Paul had served to clear a path for the spreading of the Gospel.
 2. Now, his continuing with the brethren would serve to clear a path for their joy in the faith.
 3. Would that it could be said of every Christian that our time on earth helped advance the joy and faith of others!
- E. As they continued to grow in faith (and obedience), their joy would increase as well.

1:26 **That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again**

- A. Paul’s coming to them again would be the cause of great rejoicing.
- B. However, it was really what Paul represented that was the source of their glorying – Jesus the Christ.
- C. David Lipscomb wrote: “The rejoicing would be of what the Lord had done, and the help thereto would be Paul’s continuance in the flesh.”