

Dealing With Death

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08 December 2024

Okay, so we're going to be in Philippians, Philippians chapter one. And we are, I hope, steadfastly making our way into Philippians.

But we encounter a section here in verse 19 through 26 and dealing with death. Now, this would probably not be the time I would really want to be sharing about death, but we do recognize as Christians that death is an important part of the Christian journey. It is a necessary part of the Christian journey, an unavoidable part of the Christian journey. Except to those that are fortunate enough to be alive when Jesus comes, all of us will die. Now, I speak with a little fear in this, because there may be some in here that feel they are closer to death than others.

That is not necessarily the case. Any one of us could die before another, and we all need to be prepared for death. Death is an important part of the Christian journey. And we recognize in reading the Scripture that the examples of people dying before us give us an example and a hope that Christian death is a good death. It is one not to be feared, but to be embraced in certain ways.

And so, as we look at Philippians, Paul is going to give his own example in his approaching death. And I hope it gives you and I encouragement to view death from a Christian perspective, one that doesn't view it as the world does, but in a different light. And we're going to start in verse 18, verse 18 of chapter one of Philippians.

It says what then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or truth, Christ is preached. And in this I rejoice. Yes, and will rejoice. For I know that this will turn out for

my deliverance through your prayer in the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always.

So now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor. Yet what should I choose? I cannot tell, for I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.

Nevertheless, to remain in the flesh is more needful for you. And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, and that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again. So let's pray, you and I, at one point in our life, at some point in Our life going to confront death.

It's easy to think that we're going to be ready for it. But I believe it's much more biblically and sure to prepare ourselves through the Scriptures and the grace of Christ and trusting in our own strength. So if you would just pray with me, please. Oh Father, as we do attempt to access the Scripture, Lord, to find in there a source of succor that Paul had experiencing and confronting his own death multiple times. Lord, I pray you give us the courage to die well when our time comes, Lord, not in fear, but in a desire for the fullness of what Christ has for us, Lord.

And we just ask in Jesus name. Amen. Okay, so we see coming into Philippians here that the last time I had the chance to share, Paul was talking about individuals who preached the Gospel for motives that were not necessarily pure, that there were, like in you and I desires to, in our preaching, to hack out from underneath of the next person the legs that they stand on. So in our preaching, we're preaching Christ, but at the same time we're whacking our neighbors in the way they preach Christ. We're undermining their doctrine.

And I'm not saying necessarily that their doctrine is right or that doctrine is not important. But Paul is saying, hey, look, if people are preaching the gospel, I'm glad

that they're preaching it in some way. He says in verse 18. I just glad. What then?

Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached. And in this I rejoice and will rejoice. His goal is to see Christ's message preached in whatever way possible. And now he's going to come into a way that he might preach it in one of the most important ways through his death, through his death, that how we die, how we confront death may be one of the strongest means we have ever used to preach Christ. How we die has as much influence on what our real doctrine is than what we say.

Paul said that I have the ability now basically to prove what I preach through my death. We see that that is a consistent example in Jesus Christ, that his death was the seal on the message that he preached, even more so that his death was necessary for the message he preached. We're going to start in verse 19. For I know that this will turn out from my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of Jesus Christ. So we do know that Paul is in jail of some sort.

My personal thought is that he is in, I believe, Caesarea on his way toward Rome and He is in jail. He is in a time of having to regard his own death. The Romans were not nice people when it came to criminals. I can't remember the name of the rebellion, the slaves rebellion, in which there was an uprising, right, of the slaves who were less than people and not citizens, slaves. And that rebellion, they put down the crosses that they hung them on, if I remember right, stretched for miles.

They were not nice people. And here Paul has found himself in jail, where at any moment the fickleness of anyone can result in his death. He really has to consider that his life could be coming to a close. But there, even in jail, even under the fickleness of a Roman Empire that does not value the lives of prisoners very highly, Paul has an assurance that is important to look at when we consider death. He says, for I know this will turn out for my deliverance.

He has an absolute confidence that he is going to walk through this in a way that will lead to his deliverance. And he has a lot of background to look through. First of all, he's

writing to the Philippians. If you remember, in Philippi, when he was there, there was a miraculous encounter that led to his release from the Philippian jail. So he can point to that specifically and said, I know that the Lord delivers people in jail.

And he points to two things that give him this confidence, that even in jail, even in a life threatening situation, that there is a room for confidence in the Christian life. The first thing that we looked at that his deliverance that he is sure of is that there is prayer being offered for him. Number one, that Christians in difficult and even life threatening situations should be comforted by the fact that other Christians pray for people in need. That's an important thing. We take it for granted that people care for us.

I'm always amazed at the amount of care for my children who are not necessarily walking with Christ by people because they are Christians. Christians tend to care for people when others don't. There are others who are lost and have no sense of deliverance, no sense of hope. And because they don't have people praying for them now I can go up to a sick person and just say, I hope you're doing better. I'm thinking about you.

God bless you. That's one thing, but it holds no power. But to approach the throne of God, one who holds life and all circumstances in his hands and declares that he listens to the prayer of his people is entirely different. It's an encouraging thing to know that Christians have brothers and sisters who pray for them. If you remember Peter, Peter was in jail, but there were people praying for him.

And in that prayer, an angel came and opened the doors of his cell, and Peter went out free. Prayer is an important part when you and I are approaching death. And praise God that there are people who care about us who are willing to pray. And it's an encouragement for those who may be sick, but it's also encouragement for others that it's our responsibility to pray for people. But not only is prayer an important part of the deliverance and the confidence that Paul is expecting, he says that he has also the supply of the spirit of Jesus Christ.

There is an inner source of peace that comes to Paul knowing that he's walking with Jesus. If you remember those three men after, in the prime of their youth, in the strength and wisdom, the cream of the crop, the healthiest and the strongest. But they found themselves unexpectedly facing death early. When the King made a proclamation saying, all who do not bow down to this idol are going to be thrown into the fire. They who probably would have lived longer than most of us found themselves facing death unexpectedly.

But they said, you do not need to sound the trumpet again. Let the King know that no matter what happens, we will never bow down to your idol. And so the furnaces and the fires were heated up even hotter so that even the people who throw them into the fire. Now I feel like this sometimes when I put wood in the fire, right? It's so hot that in order for me to get wood inside, I feel like I'm going to burn my hands.

But these fires were so hot that the people, people who threw them in, died as a result. But it said that someone said, hey, weren't there just three we threw in the fire? And I said, yes, but it looks like there is a fourth one in the fire. And it looks like the Son of God that there is someone to walk through difficulties with those who know Jesus Christ. Here Paul is saying, hey, look, I might be approaching my death through the cross or through the butcher block, but I know that I've already been walking with someone who promises not to leave me even during the time of death.

Paul says that even in this low spot, he recognizes that there's going to be a form of deliverance that is available to him because he already knows these principles. In verse 20, it says, According to my earnest expectation and hope that I shall not be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now will be Christ. So now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. Here we see that there is something absolutely that's giving him courage to approach his death. If we as Christians want to have this same courage in approaching death, we need to have the same kind of background or foundation that Paul had in approaching his death.

Right. You don't get on a rowboat and expect to keep up with those boats that race on Lake Washington. They're different boats. But if we can have a similar viewpoint as

Paul, I think we should expect the same kind of confidence. And here we see that his death is merely a tool for a life or a part of his life, a spiritual, lifelong pursuit of proclaiming the Gospel to other people according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed.

We see back in Romans 1 he says in verse 16, For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. For it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes. For the Jew first and also the Greek, for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. As it is written, the just shall live by faith. Not only is he not embarrassed about the gospel, he believes so fully in the power of the gospel and the ability of the Gospel to do a work in others life that his life and even the end of his life is only a tool to more fully complete his purpose in life.

And he wants his death to be the capstone to a life well lived, a direction that started and continues through his life. He wants to be bold even in the end, that Christ will be magnified in his body, whether by life or by death. If we're to approach our death well, the hope has to be that our life, whether in life or death, will magnify Jesus Christ. Will magnify Jesus Christ. We're going to see in verse 21 he says, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

First of all, he is between these two things, living and dying. For him to live, he says to live is Christ. I'm going to go to Colossians to live is Christ.

For him to live on his flesh gives the opportunity for Christ's work in his own life to continue.

Kind of gives some idea that in Colossians 1:24 it says, I now rejoice in my sufferings for you and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ for the sake of his body, which is the church of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you to fulfill the word of God. Here we see that over 2,000 years ago, Jesus died, rose again, and was resurrected into heaven. Before he died, he said, it is to your advantage that I go away. For if I do not go away, then the helper will not come. But the helper was sent as the spirit of Jesus

Christ to enter into the lives of believers to enable them to continue the ministry of Jesus Christ even though Christ was not with us.

And Paul is saying, here, look, for me to live is to give Christ's life the opportunity to continue living in the world today. That these sufferings that I get to take part of are the sufferings that Jesus would have taken part of in his life on earth if he were here. I have the option if I get to live, to continue living, taking part of the sufferings of Jesus Christ.

Now, to some of you, to some of me, that may not sound as appetizing of a statement or maybe a favorite memory verse that we want to pin on our wall. But whether you want to pin it on your wall or not, you're given opportunities daily to participate in it. That that option to take up the sufferings of Christ that he would have taken up in your environment, in your relationships, we have the chance to do it. Paul says, if I live, it only means that I get to continue taking on Christ's sufferings on my own self, to fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ. The other option is gain.

And he's going to go into that gain. That he recognized there is a reward stored up for the wicked and for the righteous, that the wicked will go to a place of unbelievable torment. But for the righteous, they come into a place prepared for them from the foundation of the world. This is a beautiful place that we live into. I love the beauty of our creation, the amount of joy we get to experience.

But God made this world in six days. He's been working on a new one for a lot longer than that. He says no eye has seen or ear heard what God has prepared for those who love him. He says Paul even was given a vision of what heaven was like, but it had to be held back. He was not even lawful to talk about it.

That there is such a benefit that comes for the believer to enter into heaven that it should be a source of continual of joy to us that one day we will leave. One of the joys of being a preacher is get to see how much pain people are going through when you're sharing, right? And I think whether you're going through pain right now, I can think you can say that this is a painful life. It hurts. It's not fair.

People are mean.

But heaven is a beautiful place. It's a joy to leave this body behind for the Christian and go to a better place.

For me to live, it just means that Christ gets to continue to share his sufferings with me. What a blessing. If I die, it means I go to be with him. Verse 22. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor.

For yet what shall I choose? I cannot tell. Paul recognizes if I get to live one thing he is certain of, that as he has walked with Christ, Christ will continue to walk with him in whatever situation he finds himself in. He doesn't discard servants for any reason. Everyone hear me.

Some people got some difficulties or some problems. I hear you. He would have thrown me out a long time ago. If it wouldn't have been kindness. He would have thrown me out too.

But he doesn't discard people. Paul, even at the end of his life, facing death in a prison, knows that his ministry moves forward because Jesus walks with him wherever he goes. No matter where you are, if you've learned to walk and serve Jesus Christ, you will continue to serve Jesus Christ until your last death. And it's amazing that some people, even in the most tenuous circumstances, have often made the biggest contributions to Christ's ministry and his work. That never should we be discouraged, thinking that we are put aside because of infirmity or difficulty or some other circumstance.

That Jesus Christ chooses to use people until their very last. Paul is confident that his fruit will remain not because of his circumstances, but because of who he serves. But he's pressed. In verse 23, he says, For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Everyone's heard the statement, between a rock and a hard place where you feel crushed, right?

There's no good option. Everything is pain on one side and pain on the other. But that's not what it is to Paul here. He is not being crushed. He sees two opportunities.

He sees two open doors, and he can't decide which one to take. He is longing to open both. I want both. Like the guy who gives the kid a candy, he's like, you can have one, right? And the kid's like, but I want them both.

I want them both. And here Paul is between two places. But it's not difficult places. They're open doors for him. Even at the end of his life, he wants to continue ministering for certain reasons that we're going to see here.

But he wants to be with Christ, which he knows is far better. Jesus, when he was on the earth, lived a sinless life, ascended to the cross, and there he became the man of sin because of his great love with which he loved us. He took your and I's sin upon him. My son Jeshurun went through the polygraph test down in West Virginia for the state patrol and he had to tell him everything.

Not everything. Please, no, please, not everything.

Not everything.

Shameful, mean, dirty, hypocritical, fully shared with anyone. And yet Jesus took everything because of his great love with he loved us. He took our sins upon his own body, experienced the fullness of the fury of the wrath of God on his own body because of the vileness of those sins. And he said while this was an expression or an act of his love for you and I, he says, behold, I go and prepare a place for you where he wants to continue that display of love for all eternity.

Who am I, a dead dog that you should show such kindness to? Mephistabeth, Mephibosheth, lame, dropped child, broken, ate at David's table continually.

And Jesus says, behold, I stand at the door and knock. I want to open a door for you. I want you to come in and dine with me forever.

He's hard pressed. Oh, I want to live for Christ. I don't feel I fully appropriated the amount of the benefit that Christ has wanted to do through my life for other people. I don't think I have fulfilled the fullness of what I could do in living for Christ. But yet he's knocking at my door and I'm struggling between the two.

I want to stay here and continue to suffer in the ministry of Jesus Christ. But he's calling me, which is far better. It says, nevertheless, to remain in the flesh is more needful for you. And being confident in this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for the progress and joy of faith that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again. Paul says, at least in this period of my life, I know I'm going to stay because that work which God is doing through me into your life isn't finished yet.

And I'm going to say the same thing for you, that Christ's ministry in your life, in his desire to reach out to other people has not been concluded yet. He still has a plan. He is still motivating you by his spirit. He is still encouraging you and giving you opportunities to fulfill, fulfill that ministry he has given you. And until that final knock comes on your door, that's what a person who dies well should be doing, is working in that ministry that God gives them.

I'm just going to close. We're going to pray. And my heart's desire for us as a congregation of real people is that we'd be really prepared to confront death when it comes. Because Christians die well, because their focus is different than the world.

Let's pray.