

Philippians 1:19-26

## **Our sure and certain hope**

I've entitled this sermon

Paul is writing here from his prison cell in Rome to the Church at Philippi. A Church he had founded during his second missionary journey and a Church that is dear to his heart. And it seems that the feeling is mutual, because time and again this Church at Philippi had supported Paul. In chapter 4 Paul says; <sup>15</sup> *Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only.* <sup>16</sup> *For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities.*

And so when he writes to the Philippians, he writes to a cherished group of people, hence *I thank my God every time I remember you.* <sup>4</sup> *In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy* <sup>5</sup> *because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,*

The circumstances Paul finds himself in are humanly speaking dire. He is in prison in Rome chained to a Roman guard and awaiting trial. Unable to leave, visit Churches and friends. In a word, he was isolated but yet speaks of his joy

We live in a materialistic world where a person's worth and security is measured in terms of his/her possessions; Money, property, health, cars, education, pedigree etc.

And no wonder the prosperity gospel, the health and wealth movement has taken off as it has. Because if you can sell a Jesus who promises money, prosperity, good health and a long life, your best life now; Followers will come in their droves. But Paul in our passage makes it clear that circumstances do not dictate our joy. For in Christ we are prepared to live or die for the cause of the gospel. Jesus speaking to His disciples in Matthew 5 said <sup>11</sup> *Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.* <sup>12</sup> *Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. We yield our lives to Him that He may lead.*

## Living for God's glory

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, <sup>19</sup> for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. <sup>20</sup> I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

There have been differing schools of thought through the years about what Paul meant here by saying that this will turn out for his deliverance.

Some have suggested that he meant being released from prison and able to continue with ministry. Perhaps thinking about v26 'so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me'. and chapter 2:24 <sup>24</sup> But I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly.

Others suggested that he meant his life is secure even if he dies. Still others say that it means both. That Paul sees deliverance in both, whether he be freed and live on or die and be with his master. And I think the latter is what Paul is alluding to when he says; I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

And there is the reason to rejoice. Paul sees God orchestrating his past present and future, and he points to this in verse 12 But I want you to know, brethren, that the things *which happened* to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel,

And that is the point here. His life, earthly possessions and prestige are not important, he sees his worth in Christ and His Gospel. Christ is in-charge of his life and work. To Paul the saints' prayers are aligned to God's will, He will deliver him no matter the outcome of his imprisonment. The Psalmist is right who said; <sup>19</sup> Many *are* the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.

It doesn't mean that Paul gets to live in this World forever without affliction, no, but that in nothing will he ever be ashamed.

Notice then, that his whole purpose in life is to glorify God whether by life or death. To the Romans he said Rom 14:8; If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

What about we as Christians? how do we see ourselves? Have we given our lives to Christ in such a way that nothing worries us?

## Rejoicing in God's will

Question; what's the worst that can happen to a human being? Sickness, financial crisis, job loss? I submit to you that there nothing more dreaded by human beings than death. Nothing even comes close. But Paul tells us in verse 21; <sup>21</sup> For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

And in v23 he adds; I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; He had written to the Corinthians and in essence made the same statement 2Cor 5:8<sup>8</sup> We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.

What do you mean Paul? But I thought dying is the worst thing that can happen to us.

But you see, if we are in Christ, we are no longer terrorised by the fear of death. Again Paul in 1Cor 15:55 "O<sup>[a]</sup> Death, where *is* your sting? O Hades, where *is* your victory?"

<sup>56</sup> The sting of death *is* sin, and the strength of sin *is* the law. <sup>57</sup> But thanks *be* to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Why is departing better by far? One might ask. David penned these words in the Psalms; In Your presence *is* fullness of joy; At Your right hand *are* pleasures forevermore.

Simply put, the struggling is over. The struggle with sin and evil and adversity and any other entity that might frustrate our efforts to glorify God is over.

This is the confidence we have in Christ if we are His.

Again notice here; Paul does not wish he was dead. It is not for the Christian to wish he/she were dead. That is the Lords decision. And though it is gain for the Christian to be with his/her Lord yet we are not called to seek personal gain. Yes our future is secure, yes there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord, but such confidence inspires us to soldier on, to do the work of the ministry, to fulfil our calling and commission. And so we seek not that which benefits us personally but submit ourselves to God's will.

And in the end we are to hear these words from our Lord 'well done good and faithful servant'.

## Being fruitful to the end

Verse 21 <sup>21</sup> For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. <sup>22</sup> If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me.

All the verses I have so far read to you where Paul speaks of the joy of being with His Lord, he then adds that his sole purpose of being alive is abounding in fruitful labour.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. <sup>10</sup> For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, Whether good or bad.

That is our calling, that we should use the gifts God has given us fully for the benefit of many; Let me quote Paul to the Ephesians and then Romans. But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them*: if prophecy, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith; <sup>7</sup> or ministry, *let us use it* in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; <sup>8</sup> he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

So as Paul says we make it our goal to please our Lord while we are sojourners in this world.

There was a man whose neighbours house caught fire. Now he being a good man decided to go in and save whoever was in there in the shortest time available before the whole building was engulfed by the flames. This man didn't enter this building to admire the pictures on the wall, the crystal chandeliers, or the views of the beach from the upstairs window. All those things were doomed. He risked his life for one purpose – to save those stuck in that building.

That is our mission Christians, this Earth is doomed and we cannot be complaisant and pretend that nothing is happening or even worse entangle ourselves with the futilities and ignorance that define its residents. Our time is short and for that we will do well to heed to Paul's advice to Timothy. You therefore must endure<sup>[a]</sup> hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of *this* life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a

soldier. And so we too are to focus on our mission and not be carried away by the affairs of this life

How then do we conduct ourselves

We live for God's glory; first question in Westminster shorter Catechism

What is the chief end of man? It is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

We rejoice and submit to God's will whether by life or persecution or death. Having this assurance; that our lives are hid in Christ.

And we are to be fruitful not living for ourselves but doing the work that is expected of us. And that in itself brings us joy.