

“The Epistle of Joy (Part 4—Philippians 1:19-26)”

How would it change the way you lived if you lived every day on earth with the end in mind? How would it change the way you lived if you lived every day on earth constantly reminded of the encouraging faith of those who have gone on before? Today’s text brings into view the dueling tensions between life and death. *“For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, ²⁰ 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. ²¹ For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²² But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. ²⁴ Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you. ²⁵ And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, ²⁶ that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.”* (Philippians 1:19-26 NKJV)

You win either way when you live God’s way!

Paul’s inspired thought in this passage can be captured with four phrases. **First** of all, we see in this passage ***Paul’s confidence***. It gave Paul great comfort and assurance to know that Christians were praying for him, because when they prayed the Holy Spirit provided the care and comfort Paul needed. Because Paul’s focus was on the future, he was able to look past his present, difficult circumstances. We should mirror Paul’s desire in verse 20 to make sure that Christ is magnified in our lives. What a privilege it is to make Jesus famous! When people look at you do they see the greatness and glory of Christ, or do they see you? Are you making Jesus bigger or smaller by how you’re living?

Secondly, we see in this passage ***Paul’s confession***. Philippians 1:21 was Paul’s personal mission statement: *“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”* Are you living for Christ, or for something else? To say, *to live is Christ* is to say that He is our total life, and He is transforming our life and radiating from our life. Yes, Christ should be present in our life, but He should also be prominent, and even preeminent. When living *is Christ* then dying is all dividends! If *to live is Christ*, then *to die* would be more of Christ, because we will be with Him forever.

Third, we see in this passage ***Paul’s conflict***. Paul’s dilemma is that he was caught between his desires to *delay* and *depart*. If he remained alive, he could invest his life in doing God’s will in other people’s lives. If he departed, then he would be with Christ in our eternal home. When the Christian believer departs this world, we are immediately with Christ! Christian believers should not fear death, because we profit when we die. Born-again believers come out ahead when we’re dead. If you’re with Jesus in this life, then you’ll be with Him forever experiencing eternal life. If you’re away from Jesus in this life, then you’ll be away from Him forever experiencing the torment of eternal death.

Fourth, we see in this passage *Paul's conviction*. It's only when we're ready to die that we can really live. Those who are most prepared to depart are most prepared to delay. For the Christian, life and death should look like to immense blessings, of which we know not which is better. Saved, born-again Christian believers who are walking with Jesus experience the great adventure that God has intended for every person to live. But, as good as that kind of life is here, the best is yet to come!

Discussion Guide/Action Steps

1. Are you praying for other Christians and Christian leaders?
2. Memorize Philippians 1:21 and make it the theme of your life.
3. Are you using your life to further the Word of God and influence people for Christ?
4. Are you ready to die if the Lord should call you home?
5. Keep your fork, for the best is yet to come!