

Walking Worthy in Trying Times
Philippians 1:18b-30
May 17, 2020
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“(18b) “Yes, and I will rejoice, (19) for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, (20) according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted 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 am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. (23) But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; (24) yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. (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 your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again. (27) Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; (28) in no way alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God. (29) For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, (30) experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.” (Philippians 1:18–30, NASB95)

We are concluding our brief excursion in Philippians, at least for the time being this morning, as we look to the end of chapter 1. Here Paul expressed his internal life or death struggle. For him, the things he was going through were enough that it reminded him of the great release he would experience the moment he stepped out of his earthly body and into the presence of the Lord. Yet at the same time, he also realized that if God wasn’t finished with His work in Paul then Paul knew he needed to get his own perspective right and with joy continue in the path God had for him.

As I was working on this sermon, I thought of a friend of mine whose mother passed during this Covid-19 season and they were unable to properly memorialize her, and now her dad living alone in a senior care facility is wanting to go also. These things tear at our heart, and we understand both sides. I saw this in 2006 when my own mom passed after surviving many years of being limited living in a stroke restricted body. Then less than three months after my dad passed from cancer, she did also. Her fight was done, and God graciously took her into His presence. Yet, I also know friends who have far outlived their spouse and what they perceive as their own usefulness for years. For them these are hard days, especially when you are worn down and see no purpose. It is hard to press on when your drive is gone. This is where Paul’s words for the Philippian believers not only reflect

an attitude check for Himself as he properly aligned Himself before God, but also a challenge to his readers to trust God in whatever trying circumstance we might find ourselves.

Later in this same letter in chapter 3, verse 14 Paul wrote, **“I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”** (Philippians 3:14, NASB95) Paul knew his life right then mattered and he would ultimately be rewarded when God finally did call Him into His eternal presence. But for this time, he still needed to press on in the present with his eye on the finish line. In these verses today, we read about him working through this issue for our benefit.

Last week we ended with verse 20, but we are going to back up to the second half of verse 18 in order to get a running start. We read in **verses 18b through 20, “(18b) “Yes, and I will rejoice, (19) for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, (20) according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.”** Paul made the choice to rejoice as he looked forward to the assurance that he would soon be physically released from the prison that held him captive. He rested in knowing that the Philippian believers were faithfully praying for him, and he knew that the Holy Spirit was powerfully working in him and his circumstance. He fully expected this, and it was in this that he hoped as he kept himself fully committed to Christ and lived such that Christ would be evident in all who looked at him. That was Paul’s hope and in a certain sense it didn’t really matter if it was proven true in his physical release or them taking his life.

This is where we finished last week. Continuing today with **verse 21**, we now have this incredible declaration. **“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”** Paul was in prison and a decision had not yet been made by Rome whether he would live or die. But Paul’s life also was not placed on hold awaiting that decision. His life was not on hold because his life was not dependent on his circumstance but on him living in his circumstance for Christ. And since his life was fully committed to Jesus and entrusting himself fully to Him, if he lived, he would continue to live for Christ and if he died, he would enter His eternal presence. As Paul saw things there was no way he was going to lose in this deal no matter how it turned out.

Some might think this flippant in regard to the value of life, but Paul understood that in Christ his physical life had real value to God and then one day he would receive his eternal inheritance with Christ in his upward calling. The only real question was, “When?” which he also trusted God to have perfectly planned. Simply put, Paul lived for Jesus. He truly was as he said in Philippians 1:1 a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, and his strength to live for Christ came through the power of the Spirit in him that is also in all who believe. We have that same calling, same hope and same enabling to sustain us in both.

People live for many things, whether its family, happiness, money, fame or fill in the blank _____. But, for Paul, as I read in one commentary, “Jesus Christ was the “Sun” around which [his] life orbited.”¹ Ralph Martin in his commentary on Philippians wrote, “Paul’s only reason for existence is that he may spend his life in that glad service; and death for that cause will be the crowning service.”² Because of that, it ultimately did not matter what the Emperor of Rome decided. Either way, he was about glorifying Jesus. Paul’s perspective on life and death was radically different than that of the world, and with this different perspective he had a boldness to stand even before the most powerful men on earth to declare the gospel while even submitting to the greatest of human injustice. Why? Because He knew he belonged to Jesus and not his circumstance.

But this did not mean that Paul was ready to pack his bags and catch the next flight to heaven. In **verse 22** we read, **“But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose.”** Paul had already written in this letter in verse 12 how he had seen the further progress of the gospel during his imprisonment. He knew that he had been commissioned personally by Jesus for ministry and that he served at the pleasure of Christ. He had full confidence in His Lord to continue that work in him for as long as he was alive and that he indeed would be fruitful just as he had known it to be fruitful up to then and even in prison. It was a tough choice, and one that he did not know how to make. But Paul also knew that even this was not his choice to make.

In **verses 23 and 24** he told them why that choice would be so difficult for him if it were his to make. We read, **“But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; (24) yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.”** We use the phrase “being torn” to speak of when we have two choices to make and we don’t know which one to choose. It begins when we are young and we are presented with taking a bowl of ice cream or a piece of cake. We tend to weigh the pros and the cons and look to our own desires in them. We might say that we really want to do one thing, but _____ (again fill in the blank _____ as we follow it with our reason not).

Paul knew if he was put to death by Rome that he would immediately step into the presence of Jesus. This is the assurance of all who believe. But he also knew that if this were to happen his ability to do the work to which he was called would end. Yet Paul knew there was still a lot of work to do for their benefit and he knew that he was appointed by Jesus as God’s man for that task.

Getting back to my friend’s dad who is also my friend as I got to know him and love him, many people reach a point in their lives when they are unable to do the things they once

¹ Dr. Constable’s Notes on Philippians, 2019 Edition, p. 35.

² Ralph P. Martin, The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians, p. 77

loved doing or to be with the people for whom they gave so much of their lives. In those times the other side of Paul's coin seems so much less attractive. There is seemingly less to live for and the attraction to be with Jesus grows much stronger. And for those without any hope in Christ, this can even lead to great depression and more. This is a hard season and we don't know why God deals with each individual the way he does, but what we do know is that God is just as loving and faithful to each of them as he was to Paul. For those in Christ there truly is a greater reward in heaven and a greater joy in the presence of Christ, but also for them there is the very real truth that God is still saying, "Not yet, trust me still." And for those who don't know Him, there is we can share.

Paul turns his focus toward how they were to continue in just a few verses, but here he was still building a case for his own continuing. We read in **verses 25 and 26**, "**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 your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again.**" Maybe it was because he knew the legal case was against him was weak or possibly just an internal assurance in his spirit, but Paul seemed to know he would be released. For him, it was not to be the end of his ministry. He was confident that he would be released and that he would be able to continue to serve with them for their growth and their mutual joy in trusting Christ and that through this they would rejoice together.

From Paul's other writings and some outside writings from early church fathers it seems that Paul was released likely in 62 A.D. but was later rearrested and martyred in Rome A.D. 68. In those years Paul did return to ministry and to the region in which Philippi was where he likely did do the very things that he wrote to them about in his letter. This would have meant that they indeed did get to experience the joy and even the boldness of seeing Paul back out on the road proclaiming the gospel for which he had been imprisoned. Paul would not be quieted, and they got to see this for themselves.³

So, Paul having first put the value of his own life in perspective, in the next verses he turned the table to talk to them about their own lives. Not knowing with an absolute certainty that he would be freed or that he would even return to Philippi, Paul wrote to them in **verse 27**, "**Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel...**" Several years ago as the Boy Scouts of America at the top national decision level was distancing itself from the moral standard under which it was founded, a new faith-based Scouting organization arose known as Trail Life USA which is continuing to grow dramatically across the country. Their motto is "Walk Worthy" from **Colossians 1:10** which in the New King James reads, "**that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;**" (Colossians

³ Constable, p. 38.

1:10, NKJV) Here in Philippians 1:27 Paul expressed that same desire that he expressed for the believers in Colossae. But what is it that they were to walk worthy of? So often, people speak of defending their family name or their national identity. We sing songs like “I’m proud to be an American where at least I know I’m free. And I won’t forget the men who died, who gave that right to me...” These are good things. They reflect a connection, an identity, an allegiance, and a committed relationship, and because of them people choose to live certain ways that align with their identity.

Here Paul reminds us that our primary allegiance is to Christ Jesus, and our primary identity is now found in Him. It is by Him that we are saved, and it is in Him that we are united as one body—His church. Beyond being a Christian singular we are together a body of believers loved by God, knit together by the Spirit, serving our Lord. We have a shared identity in Christ. But like the rest of the world, that shared identity has been challenged for the past two months as we have had to experience living it apart from each other’s presence. Today here in Oregon many churches are beginning to reconnect personally as some of the restrictions put in place by the governing authorities have been lifted.

Here in this verse Paul encouraged them to live out their identity in Christ so whether he came or not, he and presumably the whole world would hear of their example as together they stood firm in what they believed – the inerrant Word of God as the gospel of truth, and as they strived or labored side-by-side in the daily carrying out of their lives and the furtherance of the work given them by Christ.

This week we have been given by the government back some freedom that had been restricted. What are we going to do with it? What have you learned during this season? What is most important to you in life? How is Paul’s own example and encouragement to the Philippian believers speaking to you? These are some interesting questions to ponder.

Paul continued in **verse 28**, **“in no way alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God.”** There are some out there who see this season as religious persecution or as an infringement on our rights as Americans. I am not in that camp, though I do see that the line is very fine and maybe easy to transgress, which I’m sure our spiritual enemy—the devil would love. But this is not the opposition that we have been facing.

Our opposition has been a virus and the choices we make as a society to respond as they conflict with our desires and the way we have become accustomed to doing things. How are we going to respond now that we have a chance to readjust? And what foundation might this kind of adjustment lay for us maybe in days ahead when the nature of the challenges might change? Paul made it clear that we are not to be ruled by our circumstance, but by God and His sovereign hand in our lives even as we are assured of the assurance of the place we have before Him because of the rescue we have received from judgment by believing in Jesus - God’s gift to us.

For the believers in Philippi, there would be their own challenges and Paul charged them to not let their opponents or any opposing circumstance own them. Looking to the end of the Bible, we know how it all turns out. Evil loses. God wins and eternity in His presence is real. For us because of God's grace to live truly is Christ and someday each of us will experience our own eternal gain. It's with that perspective that Paul encourages us to live.

Paul added in **verses 29 and 30** that they had to let these truths shape their lives just as they had his. **"For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, (30) experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me."** To conduct ourselves worthy means to literally live as a citizen. In this life we experience many joys and we also experience trials and sorrows. We experience great gain and we experience loss. We experience freedoms and we even know at times what it is to have those freedoms restricted. If we lived as if this world was all we had, we would be in for quite a roller coaster ride and really one without any hope.

Jumping ahead to chapter 3, Paul wrote to them about their real citizenship. We read in **Philippians 3:20-21 in the New King James, "(20) For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, (21) who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself."** (Philippians 3:20–21, NKJV) My friend's father knows where his citizenship is. My prayer for him is that he would know the joy of anticipating it and that he also would be strengthened in hope until that day.

For each of us, as we are able to go out into restaurants, gather in groups and even go get haircuts which Robin and I have appointments for on Monday, it is my hope that we would do so with that same goal as Paul that all that every day we have is a day to walk worthy for Christ, and in doing this that even speaking of Him might be foremost on our tongues as we give Him praise for our real deliverance.

If you this morning do not have any real assurance of your ultimate citizenship or God has been working on your heart during this season in wondering what more is there, I encourage you to go to Him, tell Him your desire to be accepted into His forever family and trust that He sent His Son, Jesus the Christ to go to the cross to pay for your sins. As you struggle through life, Jesus came as God's responder. Just believe in Him and you're in.

For the rest of us, Paul looked forward to continuing the work in their presence once he was released. Where are you, and what doors may have been opened or may be opening to you for His service. We're still here, so we can know God is still working.

Where is your hope and how are you going to choose to live in response?

Pray.