



## Whether By Life or By Death

Last week we looked at the importance of having pure motives in ministry work. While Paul implied that the gospel can be preached even in envy and strife, it is far better for us if our hearts are aligned with Christ in ministering the truth of His gospel the world. Yet, in either circumstance, Paul found joy in that Christ-crucified was being preached. He continued with:

***Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.*** [Philippians 1:18b-20](#)

Here we can almost feel how the apostle bared his heart and soul to the believers in Philippi. On this side of history, nearly 2,000 years after this letter was written, it is easy to take a somewhat romantic view of Paul's position. We can joyously celebrate Paul's trials because we see how God used those circumstances for His glory and the salvation of innumerable souls through the ministry to the Gentile nations. We see the result and are ourselves blessed benefactors of his suffering.

Yet, soaking on this text for a moment, we also begin to sense the internal struggle Paul had. He deeply loved this church and wanted so badly to continue his ministry work with them. At the same time, as we read in the [following verses](#) of this epistle, he longed to go to paradise and experience the glory of being with the risen, glorified Lord. Until that time, he committed to live out his days in a way that brought the Lord only honor and praise. His goal was that ***whether by life or by death*** he would show his love, gratitude, and obedience to God.

While it may be quite difficult for us to truly relate to Paul here, many in the world since this writing have, and even today, are suffering deeply for Christ. Here in America, we can still openly claim and proclaim our Christian faith, but in a growing number of places doing so is very risky. In some parts of the world, following Christ means ostracization from your family, the loss of a job, exile, prison, or even death.

Let's be painfully honest with ourselves for a moment.

If accepting Christ and living for Him meant these things for us, would we still do it? Would we 'sign up' to follow Christ if it meant walking away from everything? Would we leave it all for simply the ***eager expectation and hope*** that we would somehow honor Christ and not be ashamed of our faith, and still be just as joyful even if our ***deliverance*** meant death? This is the



life Paul lived, and countless more of our brothers and sisters in Christ have experienced both in the past and across the world today.

This is a sobering thought, yet one worth seriously considering if we truly wish to call ourselves Christians. Jesus commanded us to **“deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow”** Him ([Matthew 16:24-25](#)). This isn't just in the good times when we are blessed, happy, rich, well-fed, and free. This is also in the times when bearing the cross of Christ is arduous, painful, and cost a lot, maybe even everything and everyone we love.

But faithful one, find peace in this! Look again carefully at Paul's words. Is there fear or apprehension? Did he sound worried, scared, or anxious? Was he retreating from his calling? Not at all! Instead, Paul had been prepared and strengthened with the **help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ** to endure these very things. And for what purpose? So that **“with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.”**

I have heard it said that God doesn't give us more than we can handle. I wholeheartedly disagree! Instead, God gives us the grace and power to endure what we *cannot* handle! In these times we must fully rest upon Him and His mercies alone. The power to live and die for Christ does not come from our own inner source of strength, instead it is derived from our relationship, submission, and obedience to the Lord in all things. Living fully for Christ when times are good prepares us to stand strong when times are bad.

Here we see such a stunning example of the goodness of our loving God providing heavenly strength to a mere man. If we are willing to remain faithful to Christ *no matter what*, God promises to give us the ability to endure far more than we can ever imagine.

For further encouragement on this topic, read over and prayerfully consider these passages:

[Psalm 23:4](#) ; [Isaiah 40:29](#) ; [John 16:33](#) ; [Romans 8:18](#)  
[Romans 8:28](#) ; [1 Peter 5:6-10](#) ; [2 Corinthians 12:9-10](#)

~Associate Pastor Jeremy Preece

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