

**Philippians 1: 21-26; “Hard Pressed Between the Two”, Sermon # 5 in the series –
“To Rejoice in Christ”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on
June 21st, 2020, in the Morning Worship Service.**

I have already spoken to you on Paul’s statement – For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain, but Paul wanted to elaborate more on what he means by this, and he does so in the verses which I just read to you. He tells us that, actually, he is hard-pressed between life and death. What he shall choose, he cannot tell, he says. This, I would say, his being hard-pressed, is the state of a Christian who is wise and mature. This wise perspective of Paul’s will become apparent if we will ask ourselves a few questions. 1st of all – Did Paul really have a choice as to whether he would live or die? 2nd – What does it mean to depart and be with Christ? And 3rd – What would it mean for him to remain? The answers that Paul gives to these questions will help us to better understand what it will mean for us to live to Christ, and to see dying as gain. So let’s look into this together.

1st of all – Did Paul really have a choice as to whether he would live or die?

Verses 21 and 22 – “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 I shall choose I cannot tell.” What is so very interesting about this verse is the word “choose”. The word in the Greek is ἀιρησομαι (hy-re-so-mai) which Strong’s Dictionary says means “to take for oneself; that is, to prefer”. The way that Paul has written this sentence it appears that the Lord would have him to express to Him what his deepest most heart-felt desire on this subject is. It was like the Lord was laying it before him – Paul, what do you prefer? What will you choose, now that you see that there are these two major options in relation to what I will do with your life. You have a desire to depart and to be with Me, which you know is far better. But nevertheless, it is more needful for you to remain on in the flesh for the sake of your brethren who need to be instructed by you.

Now, I think that it is good for us to understand as Christians that the Lord really does examine our hearts, and at all times, He knows the desires that we have concerning our life. But He does also really evaluate those desires, in terms of our spiritual progress in the faith; that is, how realistic to His own plans those desires are, so that He can help us to fulfill the ministry which He has particularly called us to, according to the gift that He has given to us. Although this is all ultimately ordered according to the counsel of God’s will, and it is entirely in His wise and holy hands, He still thinks upon our desires, and would have us to express them to Him, and to others of the brethren. The Lord would know what is it that you really want to do with your life, and especially if you are older and already have a ministry, what you would prefer to do with the remainder of your life?

If you do not believe that the Lord has any say in these things, please consider with me some verses that I want to bring to your attention. Let’s start with Psalm 34: 11-15? “Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord.” “Who is the man who desires life, and loves many days, that he may see good?” “Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit?” “Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.” “The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are open to their cry.” Who is the man who desires life and loves many days, David says. The Lord will look upon such a desire for long life, and it says here that He will reward it according to whether you can keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. If you will seek peace and pursue it, then God will reward you in this good way, with length of days.

The Lord through such verses as these, sets the matter before you. He certainly does have a purpose in mind for your life, but He would also like to hear it from you; what your thoughts and intentions are, in relation to all the grace that He has given to you and the particular spiritual

gift that He has given you. He knows whether you want to live a long life, but He would have you express to him and to other brethren who are hopefully wise and mature people, what it is that you want to do with your life.

Well, let's take these thoughts a little further. Turn with me over to 1st Kings chapter 3, verse 4. "Now the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place: Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar." "At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, 'Ask!' "What shall I give you?" "And Solomon said: 'You have shown great mercy to Your servant David my father, because he walked before You in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with You; You have continued this great kindness for him, and You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day.'" "Now, O Lord my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in." "And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to number or be counted." "Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil." "For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?"

The speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing." "Then God said to him: 'Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for understanding to discern justice, behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you.'" "And I have also given you what you have not asked: both riches and honor, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days." "So if you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days."

Now I want you to notice some things from these verses in relation to our study this afternoon. Solomon was a very young man, but he was following the Lord in the way of worshiping God and serving Him in accordance with all that God was saying to him at that time. It was obvious that God was raising him up to this great work of being king. But He also commanded that Solomon would ask Him for what he wanted God to give to him. Sometimes we have not because we ask not. And sometimes we ask, but we ask amiss, and spend what we receive on our pleasures, it says in James chapter 2 and 3. But we find here that Solomon prayed this fine prayer, of all that was in his heart at that time. He relates to God that He had shown great mercy to David his father because David had walked before Him in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart. He states that God had continued this lovingkindness to David and had given him a son to sit on his throne.

But then, even while Solomon is praying this fine prayer, he goes on to confess something that was very appropriate and very good. He stated that he was but a little child, and that he didn't know how to be a king or to rule over God's great people. And so he prays and asks God for an understanding heart to judge God's people, a heart that would be able to discern between good and evil. It says that this pleased the Lord, that he had asked for this thing. God then commended Solomon for not asking for long life for himself, his not asking for riches, his not asking for the life of his enemies, but rather his asking for a discerning heart. Literally, he asked for a hearing heart, it says in the margin in verse 9. Now, what I want you to see is that it was God who had given Solomon all of the gifts and abilities that he had, but yet Solomon still wanted something more than what he had already been given. He asked for the hearing heart so that his ministry as king would be glorifying and pleasing to God. He asked for a wise and understanding heart, and God gave it to him.

Was this a part of God's plan for Solomon's life? There is no doubt that it was. But I want you to see is that what took place there that day was a very real interaction between God and

Solomon over what his future life would be like, based upon what he really desired. This is same kind of interaction that the Lord is looking for from you as well. Does the Lord really look at our hearts to see what we want to become and do for Him in the future? Yes, He very really does. Even though He has determined beforehand what He will do, and even what we will do and accomplish with our life, still, He does very really interact with us over our future, in relation to the thoughts of our heart and mind. Well, He was doing this with Paul in this situation. If this is the case, then each of us must ask ourselves whether we will interact with Him over our future, at whatever stage of life we are in.

2nd - What did it mean for Paul to depart and be with Christ? And what will it mean for us?

Verse 23 says – “For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.” Now, you can understand why Paul would have this desire to depart and be with Christ. It would be a far better state than living in this fallen world. He also knew that all of his many labors in ministry, he would be able to lay them all down. And He would go to be with Christ, his blessed Savior, forevermore. Paul had a holy desire to go to be with the Lord. He knew that this could only happen when he died. It is true, that he understood that he could be taken by death at any time because of the dangers of his evangelistic missionary labors. He had many enemies and he could be martyred for the faith at any time in the midst of these labors. That would not be all bad to him, he thought. He said in Acts chapter 21, verse 13, when those brethren who loved him, were pleading with him not to go up to Jerusalem because they knew that he was going to run into incredible opposition; he said, “What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart?” “For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”

But we need to pause here and think for a few moments about what it means for the Christian to die. It is a very good thing for every Christian to think about the reality of what dying will mean. It will simply be your spirit taking leave of your body for a time. Your physical body has to die because of Adam’s sin at the beginning of the world. It is appointed unto men once to die, and then the judgment, it says in Hebrews 9: 28. It goes on to say there in verse 29 – “To those who eagerly wait for Him Christ will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.” So death for the Christian is salvation. And the salvation part is something for which we eagerly wait. First, when you die, all sin will be removed from your spirit. And then when Christ appears a second time, He will raise all of the dead, and all Christians will be glorified. They will receive their resurrection body. This may be disconcerting to the Premillennial Dispensationalist, but there will not be more than one 2nd Coming of Christ. There will only be one appearing a second time, and at that time, Christ will raise all of the dead. How do I know this? I know it from John chapter 5, verses 28 and 29.

Jesus says there – “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.” Notice the wording – All in the graves will hear Christ’s voice. Notice that there will be two kinds of resurrection – the resurrection of life for the righteous and the resurrection of condemnation for the unrighteous. Both of these resurrections will take place in the same hour of the same day. But there will be a great difference in the quality of each resurrection. Those multitudes of people who are wicked shall be raised from the dead, still in their sins, and the body which God will have prepared for them will be that same body which they had before, but raised and remade to go through the eternal torments of hell.

Those multitudes of persons who were righteous in their lives and who died before Christ’s 2nd Coming, these be raised just before those who are alive and remain until the Coming of the Lord. Then we shall hear the voice of the archangel and the sound of the trumpet of God. Then

we shall be caught up together with the Lord in the air, and thus we shall forever be with the Lord. We shall be glorified, and we shall have a body like Christ's glorious body, a body designed to live forever in perfect righteousness and holiness. I hope that you will understand that the Bible is clear; there will not be a need for a Millennium after Christ's Second Coming, but we do look for a New Heavens and a New Earth in which will dwell righteousness. For the Christian, to die then is gain. It is a far better situation and place that every Christian immediately finds themselves in, upon their physical death. Even though, as a Christian, you will step out of this physical dimension and lose your body for a time in death, when you die your spirit will instantaneously be made perfect and you will be brought into the perfect spiritual dimension of heaven immediately.

As Jesus said to the thief on the cross – “Today you shall be with me in Paradise. The Lord Jesus said – I go to prepare a place for you that where I am, you may be also. 2nd Corinthians chapter 5, verses 1-8 describes this place as a building from God. Paul says there – “For we know that if our earthly house, this tent is destroyed, (that is our body) we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” “For in this (body) we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked.” “For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.” “Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.” “So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord.” “For we walk by faith, not by sight.” “We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.”

So we see here that the earthly house, this tent, is our body. When it is destroyed we still will have a building from God. This is not another physical body, that the Lord creates at the time of our death, but rather, during the intermediate state, it is a habitation; our dwelling place in heaven. There we are clothed spiritually with heavenly and eternal glory, but we look forward to being further clothed on the Day of the Resurrection, with our resurrection body. Now, in this earthly state we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven. In the habitation of heaven, in the intermediate state, we shall be clothed with the eternal spiritual garments of a spirit made perfect in righteousness. We will be adorned with the eternal robes of the perfect image of Christ. Never fear, there will be no further groaning in heaven during this time. We will be well-pleased to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. This is what Paul desired, to depart in death and to be with Christ, which was far better. We will be content to be clothed with these perfect spiritual garments of glory, and have our own dwelling places there until the time of the resurrection of the dead.

And then 3rd – What would it mean for Paul to remain?

And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ, by my coming to you again.” As much as Paul longed to go to be with the Lord, he knew that he still had more work to do yet, in terms of his preaching and teaching to the believers in Philippi and believers in other places as well. This would be for their progress and joy of faith, to see how the Lord would use the apostle in prison and then bring him out of it at the right time, if that was His will. It is my opinion that Paul was released from this particular imprisonment and was able to go and see his brethren at Philippi. Perhaps this freedom lasted for some years. But just as certainly as Paul knew that he would remain and continue with the church at Philippi, by the time of his writing in 2nd Timothy, he knew that he was already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of his departure was at hand. (2nd Timothy 4: 6) Paul's knowledge of all of these things was quite certain by special revelation of the Spirit. The time of our joyful departure will come in the Lord's time. Let us seek to so live, that we shall be ready for it.

