



To Live or Die? That Is the Question

Introduction

Philippians 1:19-26

In 1993 when fishing in St. Mary's Glacier, Colorado, Bill Jeracki got his leg pinned under a boulder. Snow was in the forecast, and he was without a jacket, a pack, and communication. In a desperate attempt to survive, he used his flannel shirt as a tourniquet, and then used his fishing knife to cut off his own leg at the knee joint! He used hemostats from his fishing kit to clamp the bleeding arteries. He then "crab walked" to his truck and drove himself to the hospital!

In 2003, Aron Ralston had a similar experience. While hiking in Utah, a boulder fell and pinned his right arm. After various attempts to get free, on the sixth day of being stuck there, he amputated his right forearm with a dull multi-tool. Exhausted, and dehydrated, he then repelled down a sixty-foot cliff, and hiked eight miles before finding a Dutch family who guided him to a rescue helicopter. He eventually made it to the hospital and survived. He has an autobiography called *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*. An appropriate title!

What do these two stories teach us? Aside from some basic tips for adventure recreation, they teach us that human beings will do remarkable things in order to live. The whole world has witnessed this fight for survival in various ways, including the media's coverage of the horrific events of 9/11 and hurricane Katrina.

We will spend money on the best doctors; take up discipline eating habits; move to particular climates; climb up buildings, and jump off of them; and even cut off body parts to live.

But there's a big question we must answer: "What do you live for?" In this short life – we don't know how long we will live – what will you live for?

Writing from a Roman prison, a chained man tells us about the meaning of life, and the glory of death. The apostle Paul tells us about a life worth living, and a death worth dying. Verse 21 summarizes it:

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. (1:21, ESV)

This is one of the most quoted verses in the entire New Testament, and for good reason. This is what living and dying is about: Christ. Living is about serving Christ; dying is about being with Christ.¹

¹ Sermon excerpt by Tony Merida entitled "A Life Worth Living & A Death Worth Dying" found @ <https://idcraleigh.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Phil-1.19-26idc.pdf>

Open it

1. Have you ever had a touch with death? How did you find yourself in that situation and what kept it from getting any worse?

Read it

Philippians 1:19-26

Explore it

2. What two things did Paul believe would deliver him from his present difficulties?
3. In what two ways might Christ be honored through Paul?
4. How did Paul feel about the prospect of either living or dying?

8. Steve Lawson shares in the notes above that because of God, Paul was able to sleep soundly at night. What does it look like for us to lay our head on the "pillow" of God's sovereignty?

Think Different!!!

Because of Paul's chains, Christ was known (Phil. 1:13), and because of Paul's critics, Christ was preached (Phil. 1:18). But because of Paul's crisis, Christ was magnified! (Phil. 1:20). It was possible that Paul would be found a traitor to Rome and then executed. His preliminary trial had apparently gone in his favor. The final verdict, however, was yet to come. But Paul's body was not his own, and his only desire (because he had the single mind) was to magnify Christ in his body.

Does Christ need to be magnified? After all, how can a mere human being ever magnify the Son of God? Well, the stars are much bigger than the telescope, and yet the telescope magnifies them and brings them closer. The believer's body is to be a telescope that brings Jesus Christ close to people. To the average person, Christ is a misty figure in history who lived centuries ago. But as the unsaved watch the believer go through a crisis, they can see Jesus magnified and brought so much closer. To the Christian with the single mind, Christ is with us here and now. The telescope brings distant things closer, and the microscope makes tiny things look big. To the unbeliever, Jesus is not very big. Other people and other things are far more important. But as the unbeliever watches the Christian go through a crisis experience, he ought to be able to see how big Jesus Christ really is. The believer's body is a lens that makes a little Christ look very big, and a distant Christ come very close.³

9. Paul wrote this letter from a depressing jail cell and didn't want the hard times to cloud his belief in a big God. How can difficult circumstances make God seem small to us? What happens when our view of God decreases?

³ Wiersbe, Warren W.. Be Joyful (Philippians): Even When Things Go Wrong, You Can Have Joy (The BE Series Commentary) (pp. 45-46). David C Cook. Kindle Edition.

10. Paul was using his imprisonment as an occasion to bring Christ closer to those around him. Who are some people around us that need to be brought closer to God? What things can we be doing that will accomplish this?

Deliverance to Paul meant taking a stand for Jesus Christ. "I am not ashamed of the gospel," he had written to the Roman Christians on a previous occasion (Ro 1:16). Now that he was in Rome ready to face his trial, these words were doubtless ringing in his ears. In fact, his critics—who had probably read or at least heard about his Roman letter—may have gambled that he would fail to be bold and courageous in the face of the possibility of death. As Paul anticipated standing before the Roman magistrates, he was confident he would be able to practice what he had preached. In no way did he want to be intimidated and be afraid to speak clearly the message of the gospel. He wrote, "I eagerly expect and hope that I in no way will be ashamed..." (Phil. 1:20).⁴

11. Where do you find it most difficult to be courageous for Christ? Why? What can we learn from Paul's example that will help us when we are "ashamed of Christ"?

12. Is boldness a strength or weakness in the church today? Can boldness ever be a bad thing?

⁴ Quote from *The Measure of a Christian: Studies in Philippians* by Gene Getz found @ https://www.preceptaustin.org/philippians_118-24

“What Do You Want On Your Tombstone?”

If you want Paul’s secret of success in just one sentence, here it is from Philippians 1:21, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” Many of us learned this verse as children in Sunday School. We’ve heard it and recited it and memorized it over and over again. And well that we should. This verse reveals why Paul did what he did, why he said what he said, and how he found the strength to endure incredible hardship. Before going on, let’s take a little quiz. How would you complete the following sentence?

“For to me to live is _____.”

What word or phrase would you put in the blank? If your name is Michael Jordan, the word is “basketball.” If you are Mark McGwire or Sammy Sosa, you might say “home runs.” If your name is Bill Gates, the word might be “Microsoft.” If you are a parent, the word might be “children.” A politician might say “winning the election.” A lawyer might say “winning the big case.” If you are in high school, you might say “going to Homecoming.” The list of possibilities is endless. It could be fun or school or sex or entertainment or money or college or career or winning the big game.⁵

13. Take a look at your calendar and checkbook. What would those two things say about the goal of your life? Is it what you expected or desire?

F. B. Meyer said that Christ is “the essence of our life ... the model of our life ... the aim of our life ... the solace of our life ... the reward of our life.” Think of the prepositions that express relationship. We live in Christ ... for Christ ... by Christ ... through Christ ... and from Christ. He is the beginning, the middle and the end of life. He is truly the Alpha and Omega, the A and Z, and every letter in between.⁶

14. Verse 21 is the motto of a “sold out” follower of Christ. How might our interactions with the world look different if we lived out this motto each and every day?

⁵ Sermon excerpt entitled “The Life That Wins” by Ray Pritchard found @ <http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/the-life-that-wins>

⁶ *ibid*

“Fly the Friendly Skies”

We cannot live—really—until we come to grips with death. Paul’s statement to the Philippians about death was based on the previous phrase about life. He had died to himself and his own willful design for his life long before he made this statement in prison. Death was not an ending for him but the beginning of the next phase of eternal life which had begun when he turned his life over to Christ.⁷

15. In what ways are we in bondage while we live on earth? How will death free us?

*Paul’s use of the word “depart” should be a source of comfort to believers, especially those who fear the departure of their spirits from their bodies. The Greek word is “**analuein**” and has several meanings:*

- *pulling up camp by loosening the tent ropes and moving on.*
- *setting sail by pulling up the anchor and loosening the mooring ropes.*
- *solving problems by having all the uncertainties and cares of life left behind.*
- *setting free a prisoner from prison, his chains loosened and released.*
- *unyoking oxen and releasing them from the burden of work.*

No wonder Paul could have the eternal perspective of wanting to go to heaven. How we long to enjoy such freedoms described in those visual word pictures.⁸

16. What things must we be willing to let go of in order to take hold of such a perspective that doesn't view death as something to be repelled but embraced?

⁷Lloyd Ogilvie, *Let God Love You* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1974), 46-47.

⁸ Miller, Kathy Collard. *Paul and the Prison Epistles (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series)* (Kindle Locations 2965-2974). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

17. Paul seems focused in on completing his earthly mission and uses his anticipation for heaven as his impetus to carry on amidst hard times. How can the prospect of Heaven with all its benefits and blessings spur us on to greater service here on earth?

"Reach Out and Touch Someone"

Even though Paul knew that Christ's eternal presence was better, he resolved to live out his days for the sake of the church. He writes: but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. Since I am persuaded of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that, because of me, your confidence may grow in Christ Jesus when I come to you again. (1:24-26) Even though Paul knows that death is better, he decides that he should stay for the benefit of the body of Christ. He doesn't tell us why he has this confidence.

On a human level, perhaps he knew that Rome had no real reason to punish him (Melick, 86). From a spiritual perspective, he believed God had more work for him to do. There was a necessary and unfinished task, and part of that involved laboring for the progress and joy of the Philippians (25), and their boasting in Christ (26). He must do these things before going to be with Christ.⁹

18. What unique opportunities do you believe God has for you to do in this body before he takes you home?
What are you doing in the here and now to make the most of these opportunities?

⁹ Sermon excerpt by Tony Merida entitled "A Life Worth Living & A Death Worth Dying" found @ <https://idcraleigh.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Phil-1.19-26idc.pdf>

Note: This study was compiled and questions were written by Pastor Tim Badal, Village Bible Church. www.villagebible.church/smallgroups