

A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH – Part 2

Philippians 1:22-26

INTRODUCTION

Last Friday was the 60 year mark – On January 8, 1956 — **Jim Elliot, Nate Saint, Ed McCully, Pete Flemming, and Roger Youderian** were speared to death on a river sandbar called “**Palm Beach**” in Ecuador. They were trying to reach the **Wadoni Indians** with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

When Jim Elliot was killed, he had been married 3 years to his wife **Elisabeth Elliot**. They had a 10 month old daughter.

Elisabeth Elliot memorialized their story in her book *Shadow of the Almighty*. Her title comes from:

Psa 91:1 – “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High Will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.”

She titled her book this because she was completely convinced that the refuge of the people of God is not a refuge from suffering and death, but a refuge from final and ultimate defeat.

READ Phil 1:21-26

Amen. Thus ends this reading of God’s holy, inspired, and inerrant Word. May He write its eternal truth upon our hearts.

Proposition: 3 Developments in the Heart of This Man of God:

- I. Paul’s Dilemma
- II. His Desire
- III. His Decision

So That: We will think about Heaven more – we will dwell on the thought of Heaven. By so doing, we will be energized for this life.

So That: We need to know what our hope is. By thinking more of our future world, we will be more effective in our present world.

So That: Joy and Progress in the faith will come to us with a growing understanding of heaven.

1st Development in the Heart of this Man of God ...

I. Paul's Dilemma 1:22-23a

Point – **Dilemma** – a situation in which a difficult choice has to be made between 2 alternatives, especially equally undesirable ones.

But Paul's Dilemma here is NOT a dilemma between bad and bad or good and bad. → Paul's Dilemma here is a **sanctified dilemma**, a **delightful dilemma**.

Life and **death** look to the natural man like two **evils**, of which he doesn't know which is the lesser. But for Paul, they look like two **immense blessings** of which he doesn't know which is the better!

Proof – “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.**
^{23a}**But I am hard-pressed from both directions,**”

“**But if I am to live on in the flesh**” – immediately ties into 1:21
→ continues “A Matter of Life and Death” (sermon title)

“**this will mean fruitful labor for me**” –

Col 1:10 – “so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;”

1 Cor 15:58 – “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.” (i.e., **fruitful**)

“**and I do not know which to choose**” – it is a win-win situation
→ both are wonderful options in the eye of Paul

Illustration – Tug of War – with the rope anchored by Paul's love of Christ on one end of the rope ... and anchored by love of his beloved Philippians on the other end of the rope.

“^{23a}**But I am hard-pressed from both directions**” – literally that means he is pressed between two.

Illustration – It is like a traveler on a narrow path with walls of rock on both sides, unable to turn either way.

Illustration – I remember hiking **The Narrows** in Zion National Park with Zac, July 2014 – there were literally 1000’ cliffs on both sides of you as you hiked along. You are literally being pressed in because you can’t go right or left due to the rock walls on either side of you. This is Paul’s perspective on Life and Death. It is something unique compared to the view(s) in the world.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones captured the world’s perspective in his book The Life of Joy: “*First, there is a fear or hatred of death. Death is the last enemy, that haggard person that comes ever nearer and nearer, and we have a horror of it. Another attitude is that of resignation. It has got to come and I have to face it, so it is no use worrying or being annoyed about it. Then a third view, which men have tried to make popular in the last hundred years or so, is that we must have courage, we must stand up to it and refuse to be frightened; not resignation but a kind of defiance. And then, lastly, there is the Christian’s attitude*”

Illustration – I mentioned in previous sermon **Hamlet’s** wrestling with the same question as **Paul** in Shakespeare’s very famous soliloquy, “*To be, or not to be—that is the question.*”

But **Hamlet** continues ...

“Whether ‘tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing, end them.

To die, to sleep no more, and by a sleep to say we end the heartache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to. ‘Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished.”

Now to this point, the soliloquy is articulating precisely the prevalent view of death which would have been common in **Paul’s** day. But then, **Hamlet** asks this question:

***“To die, to sleep—perchance to dream.** Aye, there’s the rub,
for in that sleep of death what dreams may come when we have
shuffled off this mortal coil must give us pause.”*

What Hamlet was struggling with is the thought that death may silence the troubles and trials that are afflicting us but...what if death is worse than life?

Application – All men, you see, face **death**. But there are only few that find **life**. Jesus Christ is **life** and it is in knowing Him, the Jesus Christ of the Bible, that we can live well and face death well.

2nd Development in the Heart of this Man of God ...

II. Paul’s Heavenly Desire 1:23b

Point – Death for the Christian is never pictured in the Bible as a gain over the worst in this life. Rather, it is portrayed as an improvement on the best in life!

Proof – “^{23b}**having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better**”

Illustration – Thief on the cross (Luke 24); tribulation martyrs (Rev 6); Lazarus (Luke 16).

Same sentiment as in **2 Cor 5:6-8** – “Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord-- ⁷for we walk by faith, not by sight-- ⁸we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.”

“**having the desire**” – the Greek word is ἐπιθυμία – it means a strong impulse or longing

Can be a good desire → **1 Thess 2:17** – “But we, brethren, having been bereft of you for a short while-- in person, not in spirit-- were all the more eager with great desire to see your face.”

More often though, it is a **bad desire** → **James 1:14-15** – “each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own **lust**. ¹⁵Then when **lust** has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.”

Lust – A **desire** that is unrestrained, controlling, ruling.

How do you know if what is in your heart is good **desire** or **lust**???

Desire → Desire for God is greater than our desire for “something”

Lust → Desire for “something” is greater than our desire for God
The product of that → I will sin to get it. I will sin to keep it.

When your desire for “something” is greater than your desire for God:

When you **don’t get** your desire?

- † You are not content.
- † You are willing to disobey God to get your desire

When you **do get** your desire?

- † You serve it rather than God.
- † Your desire controls you, rules you → LUST!

When your desire for God is greater than your desire for “something”

When you **don’t get** your desire?

- † You are content.
- † You say, “God knows the best for me”

When you **do get** your desire?

- † You acknowledge God as giver.
- † You are thankful.
- † You could give it up and honor/glorify God.

But for Paul, his **desire** is truly noble ... (Prov 8:6)

→ “the desire to depart and be with Christ”

“**depart**” – The word is used of soldiers breaking camp, packing up their ‘tents’ and moving on to their final destination.

Boice – captures what Paul means: *“We can see this most clearly in the military operations of the Roman army. Whenever a party of Roman soldiers reached the end of a long day’s march they made a camp. This was no ordinary camp constructed out of a few tents and several fires. A Roman camp ... was always an elaborate affair. First, a rectangle was paced off, large enough to hold the contingent of soldiers. The troops occupied assigned places within the encampment. After the rectangle was paced out the entire encampment was secured by moat and rampart, often to a combined height of ten or twelve feet. The top was reinforced and the corners were strengthened. After this the soldiers settled down for rest and for their evening meal. In a day or two the camp was struck, and the soldiers moved on. Behind lay the camp with all its fortifications like a discarded [flower], mute testimony to the fact that they had been there. Paul suggests that in a similar way, Christians break camp to be with Jesus, while all that is not useful lies behind – all of the sin, all of the pain, all of the care and anguish of this world”*

“**for that is very much better**” – this is bad English.

If our children said “very much better” we would lovingly correct them for their improper use of English words.

But it is good Greek 😊

We are told beautiful things about Heaven in Scripture.

→ It is very fascinating, however, that there is not one reference in the Bible to believers going ‘**to Heaven**’ when they die.

→ Instead we go to be ‘**with Christ.**’

Heaven, you see, is utterly Christ-centered. Christ is the focal point of Heaven. He is its center, its axis, and its illumination. He makes Heaven live. He makes it sing in perfect harmony.

There is no sin in Heaven. There is no unbelief there. There is no idolatry. There are no false prophets there.
The Beast is not there. There are no works of Satan there.

There is no lying, no lust, no anger, no violence, no theft, no greed, no drunkenness, no pride, no hypocrisy, no discontentment, no anxiety, no depression, no dishonoring parents, no discontent, no self-pity, no frustration.

No one in Jesus' presence will ever want to sin. Being with Christ, we shall be like Him the very moment we see him. We will be in this condition forever, growing in our knowledge and love of God.

→ The Lord has us today in the grip of redeeming grace.
→ He will have us when we die in perfecting and glorifying grace.

Application - What are we to do with this?

C.S.Lewis, Mere Christianity – *“If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were those who thought most of the next. The apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who made the Middle Ages, the English evangelicals who abolished the slave trade, all left their mark on the earth precisely because their minds were occupied with heaven.”*

Illustration – While suffering from a critical illness, **Richard Baxter** spent time each day considering the hope of Heaven. Out of his meditations came his work, **“The Saints’ Everlasting Rest.”**

It was written to give Christians energy and direction for present living. Baxter encourages us to dwell on the thought of Heaven.

Balaam in:

Num 23:10 - “Let me die the death of the upright, and let my end be like his!” - the death of a believer is the death of the upright.

Application – We need to know what our hope is. **Progress** and **joy** in the faith will come with a growing understanding of Heaven.

We should think and speak about Heaven more. The world is curious what happens after death, and we have something to say!

Illustration – Youth Winter Camp ... as we speak, the students are studying God’s Word and what God tells us about Heaven.

Jesus Draw Me Nearer

*May this journey bring a blessing,
May I rise on wings of faith;
And at the end of my heart's testing,
With Your likeness let me wake.*

Paul’s **Sanctified Dilemma, Heavenly Desire, ...**

3rd Development in the Heart of this Man of God...

III. His Others-Oriented Decision 1:24-26

Point – Concern for Christ and concern for others.

“**to depart**” is better for me. “**to remain**” is better for you.
If you know Paul, you don’t need to read any further to know what Paul chooses. Short of Christ, Paul is the extreme example in Scripture of selfless concern for others over self.

No sooner has Paul said that Death is gain (1:21), than he turns back once more to those who are still in his heart and care.

Proof – “²⁴**yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.**”

Paul loves Christ. He also loves the Philippians.

His **desire** gives way to **necessity**.

His pastoral concern shines through.

“²⁵**And convinced of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith,**”

“**convinced**” – Paul has a strong trust and conviction

→ this word appears elsewhere and is translated as “confident” in **1:6** and “trusting” in **1:14**

“**your progress**” – like an army advancing even through obstacles
1:12 → Generic – “the progress”

1:25 → Specific! – “**your progress**”!

This is the beating heart and river of love of the apostle Paul and his love for the Philippian believers.

“**progress**” → means growth in love (1:9), knowledge (1:9), fruitfulness (1:11), obedience (2:12)

Application – Heaven lies before you and you have the assurance of being with Christ. In His presence is fullness of joy. At His right hand there are pleasures for evermore. When you make progress in grace, you show you are not a prisoner of your past or present.

As you “**progress**,” your heart, soul, and mind expands in the knowledge and love of God. So, your **joy** expands also.

“**and joy in the faith**” → Progress + Joy – 1:12; 18 (2 times);
“**joy**” – 2:18; 3:1; 4:4

“**in the faith**” – that is the key - the joy is in the faith

“²⁶so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again.”

“**proud confidence**” – boasting, regard as source of strength and encouragement – **Look at Phil 2:16** – “to glory” – Rom 4:2; 1 Cor 5:6; 9:15-16; 2 Cor 1:14; 5:12; 9:3; Gal 6:4; Heb 3:6

Jer 9:23-24 – “Thus says the LORD, ‘Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; ²⁴but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who

exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,' declares the LORD.”

“in me may abound in Christ Jesus” – rich word → translated as **“abound”** in **1:9, 26**

4:12 (2 times) – **“prosperity”** and **“abundance”**

4:18 – **“in full”**

Col 2:7 – **“overflowing”**

ESV – “ so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.”

“through my coming to you again” – confident expectation ...

Application – You and I also look forward to this union. But we must live for others now. It is very true that death holds immense eternal benefits for you – freedom from evil, likeness to Christ, union with Him, reunion with those that have gone before. But, this is never intended to make us flee from the duties of this life.

1 John 3:3 – “And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” → **1 Cor 15:58** (after 1-57!)

CONCLUSION

“joy in the faith” – faith is the key to accept the gift of salvation from God; hearing and understanding and accepting with fidelity the message, the truth and the demands of God. Biblical faith is the key to joy.