

## Philippians 1.12-26

### BF prayer 21 Oct:

Email from Iranian theological student Shahrockh to his tutor: “Please find attached my 19<sup>th</sup> assignment. From tomorrow I will go to prison. I am in need of your prayers but I go there with a deep joy... unfortunately, this means I will have to take the course exam in a year’s time, once I am released. I am sorry.”

Philippians a prison letter, but marked by “joy”. Why?

### 12-18a

The advancement of the Gospel by Paul’s imprisonment:

- Enabled him to preach to the whole imperial guard and to “all the rest”
- Emboldened others to “speak the word without fear” (even if from wrong motive, i.e. to afflict Paul; but others have filled the gap left by Paul’ incarceration)
- Paul doesn’t care about motives: it is that the Gospel is proclaimed which is important (see Tim Keller) cf. Gospel reading – Mark 9.38-41

Complete self-effacement: will do anything to advance the Gospel, including being imprisoned and afflicted (by rivals). He has learnt to think, and gauge everything from God’s perspective.

Indeed rejoices (regardless), simply because “Christ is proclaimed”. NB. not a morbid/masochistic rejoicing in his incarceration and attendant hardships.

At the same time, Paul never requests, or himself prays for release from hardship.

Section ends with present joy (18a)

### 18b-26

Section begins with anticipation of further joy to come (18b)

Livingstone Builders: “We begin with the end in mind.” Good slogan for life and living it.

Paul's confidence that "this" will turn out to his deliverance:

- From prison?
- Eschatological: when he appears before the judgment seat of Christ

Even if he is not delivered from prison, Paul still thinks of death as deliverance

Parallels with 2 Tim 4.17b-18, where he writes of being rescued from the lion's mouth (on that occasion) but of his assurance that the Lord will "rescue me from every evil deed to bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom". He isn't speaking of rescue from future death/martyrdom, but deliverance from evil/Satan's kingdom.

His eager expectation and hope = that Christ will be "honoured in his body" – whether by life or death:

- In his imprisonment. No shame for Paul in imprisonment as emulating Christ in suffering for no reason/at the hands of evil men
- trial (cf. report of trial in 2 Tim 4.16-18, where even though everyone else deserted him "the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it")
- release – vindication OR execution - martyrdom

He expects Christ to be glorified in his body through his suffering – see Rom 5.1-5

The alternative is that he will be ashamed – which would be the result of not abiding in, and standing up for Christ/the gospel (see 1 Jn 2.28). For Paul this meant anything short of a bold proclamation of the Gospel.

Then goes on to ponder the possibilities, and which is preferable – SLIDE cf. Paul Klee, *Untitled (Trapped)/Captive (Figure of this world/next world)*, c.1940

"For to me to live is Christ (i.e. Christ lives in me – Gal 2.20), and to die is gain". i.e. I can't lose in all this – it's a win-win situation, with death being the greater win of the two. Elaborates:

- to live = continuing fruitful labour (BETTER FOR THEM/PHILIPPIANS)
- to die = to depart ('break camp'/'up anchor') and be with Christ (BETTER FOR PAUL).

"Paul understood death as a means into Christ's immediate presence" (Fee).

He desires to die but expects to live. CF. David Watson

Concludes: more important to remain for their sake than to depart for his own sake.

His remaining is:

- for their progress and joy in the faith
- that they might glory in Christ because of his coming to them again (to teach and lead them deeper into Christ)

### Key points

1. Paul judges everything according to the opportunity it gives him to serve Christ
2. Paul isn't concerned for his own reputation or status
3. Paul's goal is to be united with Christ – better by far

But will delay that if better for the Kingdom

4. Draws his strength from:

- Their prayers. Cf. Bp Ignatius of Antioch's SLIDE 2 comment to the church in Philadelphia as he was on his way to martyrdom: "Your prayer will perfect me".

Paul finds joy in magnifying Christ and at the prospect of being "with him", regardless of circumstances, but also finds joy in his partnership with the Philippians (18b-19, 25) and in his expectation of being reunited with them (a source of mutual joy – v.25).

- The help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ: this is how Christ lives in him (Rom 8.9-10). this is how Christ will be magnified at his trial: as his Spirit is present in Paul. Cf Acts 4.13
- Hope of glory – being delivered. Hymn *Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken, Zion City of our God*.

Saviour, if of Zion's city

I, through grace, a member am,

Let the world deride or pity—

I will glory in Thy name.

Fading is the worldling's pleasure,

All his boasted pomp and show;

Solid joys and lasting treasure

None but Zion's members know.

### Suggested Discussion Questions

1. Can you think of a situation which was tough for you to face but resulted in your being able to witness more effectively to Christ or to glorify God?

2. To what extent do you assess things on the basis of the extent to which they will advance the Gospel (regardless of the cost/pain)?
3. What brings you the most cause for rejoicing in life?
4. How do you respond to those who you think serve God with the wrong motives, or in the wrong context? If that needs to change, what needs to happen (in you) for that to happen?
5. Have you ever faced the possibility of your own death (e.g. through being diagnosed with a potentially fatal illness)? How did you feel and how did you respond? If you haven't, ask yourself how you might feel/respond if you received such a diagnosis. How might you be inspired by Paul, Ignatius or the Iranian theological student?
6. How have you been supported by others in prayer? Why is this such an important ministry?