

IFES World Assembly 2015 – morning July 23
 Dr. Darrell Johnson (Pastor in Vancouver/Canada)

Text: Philippians 1:12-26
Title: “Why I Want To Go On Living”

“For to me, to live is Christ, to die is gain.”

Philippians 1:21-

“Because, for me, to live is Christ, to die is gain.”

“Porque, para mi el vivir es Christo,
 ye el morir es ganancia.”

“Car, pour moi, vivre est Christ,
 pour mourir est un gain.”

In the two sessions I have with you,
 I have been asked to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ
 as we have it in two sections
 of the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Philippians.

This morning we will spend time in chapter 1, verses 12-26.

On Sunday morning we will give our attention to
 chapter 1, verse 27
 to chapter 2, verse 18.

One of the reasons
 many believers are drawn to
 the apostle Paul’s letter to the Philippians
 is that it is so deeply personal.

In no other letter does Paul open up
 what is going on in his own experience
 the way he does in the letter he writes
 in AD 62
 from a prison in Rome
 to disciples of Jesus living in the first century city of Philippi.

It is because Paul is so deeply personal
 that a number of commentators refer to Philippians as,
“Paul’s Spiritual Autobiography.”

In the section of the letter we just heard so creatively read,
 Philippians 1:12-26,
 Paul shares with his cherished friends in Christ
 how things are going for him in Rome.

Verse 12 - "I want you to know ..."

"I want you to know, brothers and sisters,
the things concerning me."

Paul loves calling his friends "brothers and sisters"!

The term captures one of the wonders of the gospel:
that in relationship with Jesus Christ
we have been adopted into the family of God.

"Brothers and sisters."
And "beloved."
And "longed-for."

"I want you to know ..."

But not simply "know the facts."

Paul is sharing his experience
not simply to pass on information.

Paul is sharing his processing of his circumstances
to help his friends process their circumstances
in a similar way.

What God has helped him do
Paul wants God to help his friends do.

...
Now, as you know from your training in inductive Bible study,
whenever we work with one particular section
of a New Testament epistle,
we need to do so in light of the whole letter.

That is, before we "drill down" into any one section,
we need to know where it "fits"
in the flow of the whole letter.

More specifically,
in order to understand "the burden"
of any one section of the letter,
we need to understand "the burden" of the whole letter.

Thus, the question:

Why did the apostle Paul write the letter to the Philippians?
What is the "driving force," or, "drum-beat" of his letter?
What does Paul want to see happen

in the lives of those to whom
he has bothered to write?

One of the ways to discern the “driving-force”
of any person’s letter is to pay attention to repetition
in his or her vocabulary.

If you have spent any time in Philippians,
you now that next to the name Jesus Christ
and the prepositional phrase “in Christ,”
Paul’s most frequent words are
the noun “joy”
and the verb “rejoice.”

So when I first began to preach and lead Bible studies
in Philippians,
I used the title, “Joy From A Prison Cell,”
and had folks focus on
what Paul is teaching us about
experiencing joy in any circumstance
in which we find ourselves.

I think, however, that we more accurately discern
the “drum-beat” of any person’s letter
by paying attention to the writer’s commands,
to the writer’s exhortations.

The clue to a letter writer’s major burden
lies in the exhortations he or she makes.

Yes, clues also lie in the major affirmations he or she makes.

But the clue to the passion driving the letter
lies in the exhortations, the imperatives, the commands.

Now, in seeking to help their readers actually live the exhortations
most writers
ground them in affirmations.

They ground any exhortation in an indicative;
they ground any “do” in the “is,”
any “do this” in the “this is.”

That is because any imperative
only makes sense
in light of an indicative;
the imperative can only be lived out
in the light of the indicative.

Or as I like to emphasize,
 any “good advice” can only be lived
 in light of “good news.”

“Good advice” – “do” –
 without “good news- “is” –
 does not finally motivate.

In fact, without “good news”
 “good advice” is experienced either
 as oppressive legalism
 or hopeless idealism.
 So writers, especially New Testament writers,
 ground exhortations in affirmations.

Gospel imperatives
 are grounded in Gospel indicatives.

BUT we get at a writer’s “burden” in bothering to write
 by paying attention to imperatives.

Now, Paul does not give any exhortation
 until the verse right after the text
 on which we are focusing in this session.

His first exhortation comes in chapter 1, verse 27.

“Whatever happens,” or, literally, “
 “Only,”
 “conduct yourselves
 in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”

I submit to you
 that in everything he says up to 1:27
 Paul is preparing us for this exhortation.

And I submit to you
 that in everything he says after 1:27
 Paul is spelling out
 the implications of this exhortation.

It is the “driving-force” of the whole letter.

“Only conduct yourselves
 in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”

Gospel.

In Greek, *euangelion*.

From which we get the word *evangel*.

And as you know, it simply means “good news.”

The word occurs in the NT 76 times.

Of course, for the NT is all about God’s good news!

Get this: of the 76 times, 60 are in the writings of Paul!

Paul uses the word more than any other Biblical author.

He uses the word nine times in his letter to the Philippians.

That is because Paul is a man captured by the gospel.

Paul is man under the spell of the gospel.

Paul lives and breathes the gospel.

His life is a life of “participation in the gospel,”

as he characterizes himself and the Philippians
in the opening section of his letter (1:3).

He lives and dies for the gospel.

And his first major exhortation in his letter from Rome is:

“Only conduct yourselves

in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”

“Of Christ.”

“The gospel of Christ.”

The gospel that is all about Christ.

Paul is making sure we know which gospel he is talking about.

For you see, the Emperor at the time, Nero Caesar,

had his euangelion, his gospel, his good news.

As did the Caesars who came before him,

and the Caesars who came after him.

All the Caesars have their “euangelion,” their evangel.

Their “good news” that in their ascension to the throne

a new era has begun for the Empire,

for the world.

They called themselves *Soter*, Savior.

And *Kurios*, Lord.

And as *Soter* and *Kurios*,
 they had their *euangelion*,
 their “good news”
 in light of which they sought
 to shape life in the Empire.

**“Only conduct yourselves
 in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”**

Christ has a “euangelion,” an evangel.

As *Soter*/Savior, as *Kurios*/Lord,
 Jesus Christ also has “good news” for the Empire,
 for the world.

As *Soter*/Saviour, as *Kurios*/Lord He IS the good news!

So, of course, Paul would exhort us to
 **“only conduct yourselves
 in a manner worth of the gospel of Christ.”**

Now,
 the word rendered “conduct yourselves”
 is *politeuomai*.

And it means,
 “live as a citizen of the polis,
 the city, the empire.”

The majority of people in the 1st century city of Philippi
 were conducting themselves in a manner worthy
 of the gospel of Ceasar.

Paul calls disciples of Jesus,
 who in Philippi are citizens of Rome,
 the city, the empire shaped by the gospel of Ceasar,
 to now live as citizens of the City, the Empire,
 shaped by the gospel of Christ.

Later in the letter Paul will remind the Philippians, and us,
that “**our citizenship is in heaven**” (3:20).

The word “citizenship” renders *politeuma*.

“Of the polis.”

In relationship with Jesus Christ,
our primary residence,
our true residence is the *heavenly polis*.

A major affirmation,
a major indicative of the letter.

As citizens of Rome,
Paul and his friends are also citizens of heaven.

If you will, they carry two passports:
a Roman and a Heavenly.

The later trumps the former:
the passport of the heavenly City
trumps the passport of the earthly city.

Living under the rule of Rome,
they have also come under the rule of heaven.

Living under the gospel of Caesar,
they also live under the gospel of Christ.

“Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”

So, let us go back to the text before us this morning;
chapter 1, verses 12-26.

How is this deeply personal section of the letter
related to the fundamental burden of the whole letter?

Answer?

The gospel of Christ gives us a reason to live!

A reason to live in any circumstance in which we find ourselves.
However challenging or adverse.
However unjust or oppressive.

The gospel of Jesus Christ
gives us a reason to live anywhere, any time.

More to the point in light of Paul's circumstances
and the circumstances his friends in Philippi are facing,
the gospel of Christ gives us a reason
to *want to go on living*
when the circumstances
do not seem to make gospel-sense.

I think we can best get inside Philippians 1:12-26,
so that the text gets inside us
and works its transformation,
by working with three prepositions:
to,
through,
and in.

I think we can best make our way through the text
by looking at
what happened TO Paul,
what happened THROUGH Paul,
and what happened IN Paul.

(It was Stuart Briscoe, in his *Bound For Joy*,
who made a comment that triggered me
to think along these lines).

What happened TO Paul is ... well ... awful.

What happened THROUGH Paul is ... a surprise.

What happened IN Paul is ... a miracle.

Nothing short of a miracle!

A gospel of Christ miracle!

It is because of the miracle
that the surprise happens
in the awful.

TO Paul,
THROUGH Paul,
IN Paul.

I). What happened TO Paul?

What happened TO Paul is very different
than what he had planned for his life and ministry.

Very different!

Anyone relate? Most of you in this room!

He had successfully completed three missionary journeys
throughout the land masses that are
modern day Turkey and Greece.

He had helped plant dozens of new churches,
resulting in countless people coming
into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

His plan was to then take the gospel all the way to Spain,
stopping off in Rome for a visit.
Instead he ends up a prisoner on trial for his life.

Awful.

Or as we say in North America, the pits!

As the Psalmist often said –
“I am in the pits.”

Paul’s troubles had begun about four years before
writing the letter to the Philippians.

Luke, one of Paul’s traveling companions,
tells the story in the book of Acts, chapters 21-26.

Let me give you a quick overview.

Paul had gone to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost.

As was his custom, he went to the Temple to worship.

The story spread through some of the Jews who hated him,
that he had taken into the Temple
a Greek man named Trophimus (21:29).

If that was the case – and it was not –
Paul was guilty of defiling the Jewish Temple (21:28).

The hostile religious folks
 storm into the Temple,
 and drag Paul out into the city streets.

 They begin to beat him.

They would have killed him had not Roman soldiers,
 the Empire's police force,
 moved in and broken up the mob.

Since it appeared that Paul was the instigator of the trouble,
 the police arrest him,
 bind him in chains,
 and haul him off to a military jail.

Awful pits.

Later that day,
 the police let Paul make a defense before the religious Council.

In his speech, Paul claims he had met the Risen Jesus of Nazareth,
 and that he was on trial for the very hope of Israel,
 the resurrection of the dead.

Preaching the resurrection ignited a heated debate
 between the Pharisees and the Sadduces;
 the Pharisees believed in resurrection,
 the Sadduces did not.

The heated debate turned into a brawl.

Again the Roman police are called in,
 and once again haul Paul off to the military jail.

While in jail, forty zealously hostile Jews take a vow
 to neither eat nor sleep until they have killed Paul (23:12-21).

So during the night,
 a battalion of Roman soldiers
 smuggle Paul to the sea-port town of Caesarea,
 where he is placed in custody for his safety.

Paul assumes, as would any of us,
 that he would be there for a short while;
 after all, he had done nothing wrong.

But, he was detained in that Caesarean jail for two years!
Two years!

Awful pits.

Appearing a number of times before Felix, the Roman governor.
Felix would frequently interview Paul,
raising his hope of being released.

But Felix was only trying to extort money from Paul.

Eventually, Felix was replaced by a new Roman governor, Festus.

In one of his hearings before Festus,
Paul utters the fateful words:

“I appeal to Caesar” (25:11).

Every Roman citizen had the right
to appeal their case before the Emperor himself.

When such an appeal was made,
all other proceedings stopped;
the local authorities then bound by law
to take the prisoner to Rome.

So Paul is put on a ship,
and sent off to the Capital of the Empire.

After a very harrowing trip on the seas,
he finally arrives in Rome.

Again he assumes he will get to make his defense before Nero
in relatively short order.

But he has to wait another 18 months for his court date!

During those months
he is chained to, or, at least, guarded by,
Roman soldiers day and night.

Imagine:

For four years one of the greatest thinkers in world history;
one of the most gifted theologian,
preacher, missionary who ever lived;
locked up, confined,

held back from his great passion
to evangelize the world.

Jails in 1st century Rome were horrific places to be in:
dark, filthy, disease ridden.

Not to mention the shame experienced
in a shame and honour culture.

Awful pits.

From those crummy circumstances,
Paul writes to his friends in Philippi who are praying for him.

You would expect,
after all that happened TO him,
his letter would communicate a sense of frustration,
bewilderment, even despair.

But instead the dominant note of the letter is joy.

“Rejoice, again I say rejoice.”

Why?

II). Because of what happened THROUGH Paul.

Philippians chapter one, verse 12:

“Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters,
that my circumstances have turned out for
the greater progress of the gospel.”

Surprise!

Note the word “greater.”

Paul is rejoicing in the pits
because his circumstances in the pits
have served to further the gospel
in a greater way than his original plan would have!

What does he mean?
How can this possibly be?

Paul points to two things that happened THROUGH him;

he points out two surprising ways the gospel was advanced
through his imprisonment.

The first way:

Verse 13 – “It has become well known
throughout the whole Praetorian Guard
and to everyone else,
that my imprisonment is for Christ.”

It is easy to imagine
the soldiers guarding Paul in four-hour shifts
asking him why he is in trouble.

And it is not hard to imagine,
Paul taking the opportunity to speak about Jesus!

For it was preaching Jesus
as Risen Lord that got him in trouble.

Now, because of who the soldiers serving in four-hour shifts are,
the gospel was being greatly advanced.

Paul refers to them as the “Praetorian Guard.”

They were the elite young men of the Roman Empire.

They were a hand-picked military unit,
chosen to serve as bodyguards of the Emperor.

They were also called on to guard all Imperial prisoners,
which Paul was due to having appealed to Caesar.

They were quartered, housed, in Caesar’s palace,
and were paid more than any other soldiers.

They were also granted the high privilege of Roman citizenship.

They were commissioned to serve for 12 years,
after which many retired in the city of Rome.

Over the years, as you can imagine,
the veterans of the Praetorian Guard
became a powerfully influential force
in the military and in the government.

Indeed, as the years went by,
 they became so influential
 that their candidates for the Senate
 nearly always won election,

 and their choice for Emperor
 was nearly always confirmed by the Senate.

So William Barclay can call the Praetorian Guard,
 “The King-Makers of the Empire.”

See what is happening THROUGH Paul?

And see what is happening to the Roman Empire THROUGH Paul?

These young men, these “King-Makers,”
 were chained to one of the most brilliant thinkers in history.

 For four hours a day!
 It was like being chained to Plato or Aristotle
 four hours a day.

Four hours a day,
 chained to
 one of the greatest theologians in history.

They were, if you will, Paul’s “captive audience.”

One of my favorite Bible teachers of the last century,
 Ray Stedman,
 makes this observation:

“I suggest that if you want to feel sorry for anyone
 that you feel sorry for (the young soldiers).

 Here (the soldier) is,
 trying to lead a quiet, pagan life,
 and every so often he is ordered out
 and chained to this disturbing man
 who says the most amazing things about
 the one called Jesus of Nazareth,
 risen from the dead.”

(Authentic Christianity, 26).

Since the soldiers would rotate through the four-hour shifts,
 Paul would have spoken with nearly every one of the elite;
 hence Paul speaks of “the whole guard.”

(Gordon Fee, 113).

One by one, the “King-Makers” were exposed to Jesus Christ
 and His gospel,
 His good news for the world.

One by one the elite of the Empire were finding Christ,
 and bowing before Him as *Soter* and *Kurios*,
 as Savior and Lord.

The second to the last verse of Philippians – 4:22 -
 needs to be read with a note of triumph:

“All the saints (in Rome) greet you,
 especially those of Caesar’s household.”

So Ray Stedman goes on:

“ ... anyone who can read between the lines a bit
 will see what is happening here.

It is clear that the Lord Jesus,
 in His role as King of the earth,
 has appointed (the Emperor) Nero
 to be the chairman for the Committee
 for the Evangelization of the Roman Empire.

Nero does not know this,
 but then emperors seldom know
 what is really going on in their empires.”

(Ibid, 25).

Surprise!

The leadership of Rome was being infiltrated and won for Christ.

Paul could not have designed a more effective strategy!

His awful imprisonment
 turned out for the greater progress of the gospel!

So can any awful circumstance in which
 you and I find ourselves.

I like how NT scholar Gordon Fee expresses it:

to everyone other than believers, Caesar is Lord;
 “but to Paul and to the believers in Philippi,
 only Jesus is Lord (2:11),
 and his [Jesus’] lordship over Caesar
 is already making itself felt through
 the penetration of the gospel into
 the heart of Roman political life” (113).

And I like how NT scholar Gerald Hawthorne puts it:

“Thus, what appeared at first to be a fatal blow
 to the Christian mission,
 the arrest of Paul,
 turned out to be
 the means of its realization,
 the key to preaching the gospel
 before governors and kings (cf. Mark 13:9)
 and their staff personnel” (35).

That is why Paul can say,

“I want you to know ... my circumstances
 have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel.”
 Surprise!

And there is another way his circumstances
 furthered the cause of Christ in the world.

Verse 14 – “Most of the brothers and sisters,
 trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment,
 have far more courage to speak the word of God
 without fear.”

Christians in Rome were spurred on to bolder witness for Christ
 as they witnessed Paul’s courage in jail.

Oh, I imagine some would have actually become more afraid,
 for they would have feared ending up in jail
 if they spoke as boldly as did Paul.

But most were encouraged to be as bold as Paul.

“If Paul can do it under chains,”
 they reasoned,
 “we can do it in freedom.”

“If Christ can work in prison
 certainly He can work in the marketplace and home.”

The implication of what happened THROUGH Paul
 is even greater than that.

The Christians in Rome could no longer wait for
 “the trained evangelist” to do the work for bearing witness.

With Paul locked up,
 it was all up to them.

Either they did it, or it did not happen!

Again, Ray Stedman sees what is going on THROUGH Paul.

“The fact has always suggested to me
 that the best way to evangelize a community
 would be to start by
 locking up all the preachers in jail!
 Other Christians might then begin to realize
 that they, too, have gifts for ministry
 and begin to exercise them in effective ways.

Sometime I would like to try it.” (Ibid, 28).

No thank you, Ray!

Maybe if we were let out on weekends.

But if that would serve to win more of our city to Christ,
 I will give it a go.

Now, Paul is not saying that his imprisonment did not cause him pain.

It did.

Especially when some Christians
 began to preach Christ to displace Paul.

Imagine that!

Christians preaching Christ to would another Christian!

Apparently some folk in Rome were jealous
of Paul's reputation and statue
and influence in the Roman church.

So they took Paul's imprisonment as an opportunity
to advance their own status
and their own ideas of what the church is to be.

And it deeply wounded Paul.

For all of Paul's strength and courage
he was not "thick-skinned" (F.W. Beare).

He was not constituted to say, "it is no big deal."

It hurt badly.

Yet, Paul could rise above the hurt,
and see things in a larger perspective.

Verse 18 –

"What then?
Only that in every way,
whether in pretense or in truth,
Christ is proclaimed;
and it this I rejoice."

Paul knows that God is bigger than our ego-centric motives.

I, for one, am keenly aware of how my ego
can get entangled in what I do;
I know that personal ambition
taints much of what I do "for Christ."

But thanks be to Christ,
He still gets His purposes accomplished
through less than perfect motives.

All that happened THROUGH Paul can encourage all of us.

For it means that every situation we face,
however adverse,
can have meaning.

Everyday circumstances can be shot through
 with meaning and purpose;
 for every everyday circumstance
 can serve to advance the gospel.

I think of all the stories of how God
 turns tragic circumstances into opportunities
 for Christ to manifest Himself as Saviour and Lord.

We will hear many during this World Assembly!

I think of Adoniram Judson,
 American missionary to Burma, as it was then called.

For the first 14 years of his ministry he saw no visible fruit.

 All he had to show for the 14 years
 was the graves of his wife and all their children.

 And many imprisonments.

 And diseases wasting his body away.

Then at what he said was his lowest point,
 he prayed that he live to translate
 the entire Bible into the language
 of the Burmese people,
 and to serve a church of at least one hundred people.

 (So Paul Rees, *The Adequate Man*, 30).

And he did!

Paul saw his whole experience, his whole life,
 in light of the gospel of Christ,
 under God's overarching plan for history:
 getting the good news to all people.

For the apostle Paul, and other Biblical writers,
 one of the major reasons God lets history keep going
 is to win more and more people to Jesus.

As Jesus says:
 "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached

in the whole world for a witness to all nations,
and then the end shall come” (Matthew 24:14).

As I read the Scriptures,
the only thing God is committed to sustain and prosper
is His Kingdom.

God is not committed to the survival of any one nation
or any one political agenda
or any one standard of living.

God sustains them
as long as they serve His greater purposes
of justice and mercy and truth.

God will use the rise and fall
of kingdoms and nations and systems
to bring as many people as possible
to Himself in Christ.

In the end the Kingdom of God is all that will stand.
As we shall see when we turn to Daniel tomorrow.

Paul had aligned his life
with God’s overarching plan for history,
and so could rejoice even though
he was still in prison.

Surprise!

III). Which brings us to what happened IN Paul.

What happened IN
Paul made possible all that happened THROUGH Paul
after what happened TO Paul.

TO Paul – awful pits.
THROUGH Paul – surprise.
IN Paul – miracle.

Verse 19 –

“For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance ...”

The word translated as “deliverance” is *soteria*,
the word ordinarily translated “salvation.”

What is happening TO Paul is serving to further his salvation.

There is scholarly debate as to what Paul means by his
“deliverance/salvation.”

Does he mean that he is confident
he will be acquitted by Nero
and released from prison?

Maybe.

But note that he does speak frankly of the possibility of death.

Or does Paul mean that his circumstances
serve to further his own spiritual formation and growth?

I think so.

Something had happened IN him and was happening IN him,
that is advancing his own salvation.

God uses everything in our lives to further our salvation!

What happened IN him?

What was happening IN him?

A miracle.

A radical re-orientation of his life;
a radical re-orientation of his soul

A de-construction and re-construction.

A de-centering and a re-centering.

A moving from living for himself and his own interests,
to living for Jesus and Jesus’ interests (2:20-21).

That is the heart of our salvation, our deliverance.

A revolution of massive proportions.

One in which we will be caught up in the rest of our lives.

From centering life around the ego
to centering our life around the Living God in Jesus.

The revolution began for Paul that day on the road to Damascus.

It continued through all that happened TO Paul
from that day until he landed in a Roman jail.

And it was being furthered in his imprisonment.

Christ was moving Paul further into the True Center.

Adverse circumstances have that effect, do they not?

Adverse circumstances have a way
of peeling off the non-essentials,
cutting through the ultimately meaningless baggage,
and bringing us into what finally counts.

In prison, Paul came to realize more fully than ever,
that Jesus
is the beginning,
the end,
and the middle;
He is the origin,
ground, and goal of all things.

As he writes from prison to the Colossians:
all of creation was made by Him and for Him (1:16),
and is held together in Him (1:17).

As he writes from prison to the Ephesians:
all of history one day culminates in Him (1:10);
everything is re-capitulated in Him.

All of life flows out of Christ and is found in Him.

What happened IN Paul radically re-orientes his reason for living.

Verse 20 –

“It is my earnest expectation and hope,
that I shall not be put to shame,

but even now, as always,
 Christ shall be exalted in my body,
 whether by life or by death.”

As one commentator put it (Ellicott):
 Paul wants his body to be
 “the theatre in which Christ’s glory is displayed.”

So do I! And so do you!

“Whether by life or by death.”

With Jesus as centre,
 both life and death have meaning.

So Paul can make that great declaration:

Verse 21 –
 “Because, for me, to live is Christ, to die is gain.”

“Porque para mi el vivir es Christo,
 ye el morir es ganancia.”

“Car Christ est ma vie,
 et la mort m’est un gain.”

Miracle!

The radical re-orientation gave Paul a reason, a motive, for living
 that hold regardless of the circumstances.

A reason, a motive, that transcends and infuses
 one’s state of health,
 one’s location,
 one’s financial condition,
 one’s relational status.

“To live is Christ.”

Paul cannot loose,
 for he can live with, in, for Christ
 anywhere
 in any situation.

We cannot say that
 about other reasons for living, other motives for living.

They are all conditioned by one thing or another.

Paul's reason for living is not even conditioned by death!

"To die is gain."

Gain?

Gain what?

More of what he already has ... more of Christ!

We need to be clear:

Paul's declaration does not emerge from despair.

He does not consider death a gain
because life has become too much to bear.

Although, given his circumstances
I would not blame him for feeling it was.

No, life for Paul was still meaningful and challenging.

"Those of Caesar's household greet you"!

He is simply saying that death will mean,
"greater fullness of a life that is already rich and full."
[F.W. Beare]

Which is why Paul feels ambivalent about his future.

Verses 23-24 –

"I am hard-pressed from both directions,
having the desire to depart and be with Christ,
for that is very much better;
yet to remain on in the flesh
is more necessary for your sake."

To "depart" ... the word means
to "pull up stakes,
to weigh anchor."

To "depart" ...
and enter into face-to-face with the Ascended Christ
is far better.

Paul uses a triple comparative:

“more better to a greater degree”
(Daniel Fuller).

Most people fear their own death.

Maybe you do.

Paul does not.

For death does not the pose the dilemma of
“have” versus “have not”;
the choice of “be” and “not be.”

One of the most insightful NT scholars of the last century,
Handley Moule, said it so well:

the dilemma death poses is between
“Christ and Christ,
Christ much and Christ more,
Christ by faith and Christ by sight”
(*Philippian Studies*, 257).

When you know Christ you have everything to gain!

Miracle in the awful pits.

Paul does not fear death because he found life – in Christ!
And death will mean more life – in Christ!

On the other side of the veil that separates this life from the next
is the same Person Who we know on this side.

Death means moving into deeper relationship with Him.

I do not know what happens at death
for those who do not know Christ,
who are living now without Him.

But I do know what happens at death
for those who do know Christ,
and are living now with Him and in Him.

“More better to a greater degree.”

So in the seventh book of *The Chronicles of Narnia*,
in *The Last Battle*,
C. S. Lewis speaks of death as

“further up and farther in.”

The Faun says (all the animals in Narnia talk) ...
the Faun says to Lucy,

“The further up and farther in you go,
the bigger everything gets.
The inside is larger than the outside.”

Death is like peeling an onion;
only as you continue to move toward the centre,
each circle is larger than the last.

“More better to a greater degree.”

So, what happened IN Paul?

He had been brought further into
the Centre of the Universe.

And it freed him from the fear of death.

And because he had come to terms with his own death,
he was free to live more freely.

And the reason to go on living was crystal clear.

Life is a journey of getting to know the Creator and Redeemer.

And helping fellow pilgrims find and know and live for
the Creator and Redeemer.

So Paul can say,

Verse 26 –

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

Paul sees all his relationships in light of
God’s greater purposes in history.

He lives that others might
progress in believing,
and in believing find great joy.

As I said when I began,
 Paul does not share his experience
 simply to pass on information.

He shares in hope that the Philippians will also
 live with the same motive:

to so live in Christ and for Christ
 that they too live that others find Christ
 and grow in Christ.

Can you imagine what it would be like
 to live in a community where everyone
 is living with that motive?

IFES World Assembly certainly gives us taste of what it can be!

Look out world!

“Worthy of the gospel of Christ.”

When I die,
 when I pass through to the other side –
 “more better to a greater degree” –
 I want to say,

“How I lived in the city mattered;
 what I did in my neighborhood mattered.”

I want to say,
 “Thank God, it counted – for time and eternity.”

Others encountered Jesus Christ!

You want to be able to say it too.

So hear Paul say with joy ... from a prison cell:

“It is my earnest desire that Christ always be exalted in my body,
 whether by life or by death.

Because, for me,
 to live is Christ,
 to die is gain.”

Before we respond in singing
I invite to be silent before the Lord.

And in the silence (Psalm 62:1,5),
take out your journal, as it were,
and write on the top of the page,
“The reason I want to go on living,”

And watch what emerges from your soul.