

Philippians 1.18b-26 Sermon / COB / 08.21.16

Introduction

- † **[1: Title]** Some Bible questions are difficult to answer. Since Adam was created, not born, did he have a bellybutton? Why wasn't Eve surprised when the snake started talking to her? How did John the Baptist recognize Jesus as the Messiah when they both were still in the womb? If all the angels in the Bible are depicted as male, why are almost all angel trinkets female?
- Then there are questions children ask: Will there be McDonalds in Heaven? [Or we would say, on the new Earth.] When Jonah was in the whale, did the whale have a tummy ache? How long is eternity?
 - But seriously, what are you going to say if one of our children comes up to you and asks, "What is the meaning of life?" I want you to imagine this, because it could very well happen. Most children eventually come to such questions. Are you prepared to answer this? What is the meaning of life? How do I find my purpose in life?
 - We discuss this today, along with what it means to receive God's deliverance and why we should look forward to dying even though death itself is an evil thing.

Exposition

- † **[2: 1.18b-20]** We are studying Philippians 1.18b-26. "b" refers to the last part of 1.18. I will have the verses up on the screen in the New English Translation. We will begin with 1.18b-20.

Philippians 1.18b-20 NET: Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. My confident hope is that I will in no way be ashamed but that with complete boldness, even now as always, Christ will be exalted in my body, whether I live or die.

- † Paul just finished saying he was rejoicing, because he knew his imprisonment was helping advance the gospel mission by encouraging others to preach the gospel throughout Rome.
- Now he shifts to the future and says, "I will continue to rejoice." Why would Paul continue to rejoice? Because he is certain of his deliverance.
- † **[3: word-for-word]** What is this deliverance, is it deliverance from prison? No! You would think it would be, right? If you were in prison, for years, probably all you would be thinking about was when you could get out. But not Paul.
- Many English translations break this into two sentences, making it possible to overlook the connection, but in Greek this is one sentence which makes clear what kind of deliverance Paul is expecting. Let's read this again as one sentence...
 - **Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ [according to] my confident hope [which] is that I will in no way be ashamed but that with complete boldness, even now as always, Christ will be exalted in my body, whether I live or die.**

- **[4: ashamed]** So what is Paul's deliverance here? He is not concerned about his deliverance from prison. The deliverance Paul expects is that he will in no way be ashamed.
 - To be ashamed can have more than one nuance, so we should be clear about this: Paul is not talking about his self-perception, of feeling shame. The NASB says it more clearly: "I will not be put to shame in anything." In other words, Paul expected he would not be disgraced.
 - He might live free or die as a criminal, but either way he trusts he will not be disgraced. Most people would see imprisonment, trial, and execution as shameful no matter what, but Paul says even in this situation, he would be delivered in the sense that he would not be disgraced.
- † **[5: exalt]** Why? In what way would this deliverance be realized? This had nothing to do with his reputation or the imperial court's decision. He might be convicted in court and convicted in social opinion, but he would still be delivered. For Paul, deliverance was empowerment to continue boldly and openly exalting Christ in all that he did, whether through his life or through his death.
- **[6: live or die]** The NET says "whether I live or die," but the Greek literally says "whether through life or through death," because it is not just that the court's judgment of life or death is irrelevant, it is that Paul would exalt Christ through the way he would live or through the way he would die, whatever the court decided.
- † Why would Paul consider that to be deliverance? He is not thinking about physical deliverance, is he? He is thinking about spiritual deliverance. To represent Christ well in every moment would be true experiential righteousness. That's Paul's aspiration, to see the salvation-sanctification process complete in him, such that he would be so righteous in behavior that he honors Christ all the time, no matter what. His deliverance is to live for Christ, to follow and serve Christ. This is "top line" thinking based on God's revelation!
- The Philippians use "bottom line" human reasoning and they desire physical deliverance for themselves, so they assume that physical deliverance indicates God's approval and suffering indicates God's disapproval, but this is wrong. Paul knows he is vindicated in the heavenly court; Paul is delivered – he is in the will of God – even while imprisoned.
 - He might be executed as a criminal, but in even that moment he can glorify Christ, by not denying his faith to avoid death, by allowing faith to sustain him through death, and by dying for the gospel as a martyr-witness for Christ.
 - There are two conclusions I want you to take from this. First, suffering is not shameful; please accept this truth. Your suffering is not shameful, you should not be embarrassed about it, it does not reflect God's judgment about you, you can come to us for help and prayer support and you can go before God without shame. Second, spiritual deliverance is about living and even dying in such a way that we are characterized by righteousness, so that we bring glory to Christ.
- † How many of you have thought in these terms when you were in trouble? Not many of us, I suspect; not me, either, but I am trying to learn to think this way.
- It is not wrong to hope God will remove your problems; it is not wrong to pray for that physical deliverance. But as God's people, we do need to learn to focus more on spiritual realities and yearn for spiritual deliverance.
 - If my greatest desire and goal is to honor Christ, then even while I am suffering, even while I am praying for an end to that suffering, I will be looking for ways to bless others, to share the

gospel, to serve in church, to publically praise the name of Jesus. And because that is my focus – and because I know my suffering is not shameful and it does not reflect God being angry with me or not loving me – I will experience more joy and peace as I trust in God’s plan and realize that I can worship and serve even in my pain.

† **[7: means]** Let’s shift to a different question: On what does Paul depend for his deliverance to become reality? He trusts God will deliver him, but he knows the means God uses are the prayers of the Philippians and the Holy Spirit’s empowerment. Do you see that?

- If an apostle as sanctified as Paul knew he needed others to pray for him in order to glorify Christ and not give in to tiredness, frustration, or any other temptation or deception, then what about us, don’t we need prayer support to sustain the godly way of life, to glorify Christ in every moment? How necessary are our prayers of intercession for missionaries and each other?
- One way the Philippians partnered with Paul in the gospel mission was by providing ongoing prayer support; he knows he needs that to continue. My pastor friends and I pray for each other every week. Why? Because we know we need it, that we cannot make it without prayer support. So consider: should you have some prayer partners in this church? Small group is a great place to find willing prayer partners!

† If Paul needed the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, then we need this also. We need to remember we are never alone, the Holy Spirit is always with us, even if we are falsely accused, standing trial, facing execution.

- We need to learn to depend on him, to yield to him and allow him to lead us and empower us. Paul was a great man, but he was just a man, given to physical problems, troublesome emotions, and a messy life full of obstacles to his faith and ministry, just like us; and just like us, he too faced temptation, especially to be intimidated, to compromise, to shut up, to weaken his witness for Christ, to succumb to frustration or despair. By depending on the Holy Spirit, he could endure, not just surviving, but rejoicing and witnessing! I want that for my life.

† **[8: 1.18b-20]** Thankfully, at the moment, none of us are in prison for sharing the gospel. But we have issues, right? We have illnesses, pains, and disabilities; we have frustration, anger, depression, anxiety, and stress; we know hostile people, we have relationship problems; we lose our jobs and struggle to pay the bills; we have unrealized goals and dreams.

- Are we going to let these things defeat us such that we weaken in faith and lose our joy? Are we going to let them distract us and thus weaken our ministry and witness for Christ? Or will we choose to rejoice in our salvation, depend on the Holy spirit to get us through, and focus on serving Christ no matter what is happening to us?
- When we hurt, are we going to rely on the pleasures of this world to soothe us, such that we depend on food, drugs, television, the internet and video games, anger and violence, sex or pornography, or will we learn it is ok to feel the pain, if we depend on God to get us through it?
- Will we let worldly pleasures distract us or choose to focus on Christ and his work? How important is a life of righteousness to you? How important is it to represent and glorify Christ in every moment?
- When I got out of seminary, I was all pumped up to plant a church in Florida. When that did not work out, I felt embarrassed, like I had the shame of failure; I wondered why God had sent me to seminary if he was not going to empower me in ministry; I was angry, frustrated, depressed.

But as I continued to pray and study scripture, God showed me what Paul is teaching us today: there is no shame in suffering, and the deliverance we should seek is not so much physical success as it is to be a good witness for Christ in our moments of failure and struggle, even in our times of sacrifice or suffering. Let's finish our text...

[9: 1.21-26] Philippians 1.21-26 NET: For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. Now if I am to go on living in the body, this will mean productive work for me, yet I don't know which I prefer: I feel torn between the two, because I have a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far, but it is more vital for your sake that I remain in the body. And since I am sure of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for the sake of your progress and joy in the faith, so that what you can be proud of may increase because of me in Christ Jesus, when I come back to you.

† Here is Paul's explanation for his attitude: the deliverance he seeks is empowerment to glorify Christ in life or death, for [or *because*] in his view, living is Christ and dying is gain.

† **[10: live]** What is the purpose of life to Paul? Paul says, "to live is Christ." In the next sentence, he elaborates that living to him means "productive work" or "fruitful labor" for Christ.

- For Paul, to live is to be focused on Christ, empowered by Christ, conformed to Christ, glorifying Christ, serving Christ by carrying out Christ's gospel mission and helping Christ's people like the Philippians to also pursue the gospel mission. This is how Paul views life in the physical body, this is not just some sort of spirituality in his head. If you believe in the gospel, you live it out. For Paul, life – or any part of life – has no meaning apart from Christ.
- Do we believe this? Do we live this out? How would it look? Would it look more like when we go on missions trips and we spend our entire day finding ways to worship, to serve people, to teach people, to reach people for the gospel? or would it look more like the average American, pursuing leisure and comfort?
- According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in an average day, Americans enjoy over five hours of leisure, including almost three hours of television. You know how much time we spent in religious and other volunteer activities: less than half an hour. We have room to improve, eh?
- Scholar Gordon Fee says people tend to speak like Paul, but live otherwise. He says, "One wonders what the people of God might truly be like ... if we were once again people of this singular passion." He goes on to say that too often our purpose in life is Christ plus work plus leisure plus wealth and materialism plus popularity, and so on. And all too often things other than Christ have become our primary passion.
- The slave of Christ who is living on what we call the "top line" by faith and obedience to God's revelation, serves Christ and the gospel, not himself. This is why Paul is ok while imprisoned: he simply continues his gospel mission there, knowing that if God wants him to continue again out of prison then God will set him free. Paul's focus is not on the comforts of life, but rather on effective ministry. And this is why he can be content instead of anxious.

† **[11: death]** What does Paul say about death? To Paul, to die is to be with Christ and be blessed! He has a desire, a longing to depart and be with Christ! Though death is a result of sin, God uses it to deliver us out of the struggle, into his presence in Heaven. To Paul, that is much better indeed!

- We should let this inform us about Heaven: upon death, believers made alive in Christ go immediately into the presence of Christ and God the Father, in Heaven.

- Yet, how many of us are still afraid to die? how many of us still cling to life? Can you see how Paul's perspective could remove our fear, our hesitation to take risks for God? If life is all about Christ and death is to be with him, then we can be bold and fearless in choosing to live in a way that is sincere and blameless, that is honoring to our faith, obedient to God's revelation, glorifying to Christ.
 - Paul understands there are only two kinds of problems if you stay focused on God: those God gets you through and those which result in God taking you home. In either case, God brings physical deliverance! And if you continue to honor God throughout, then you have realized spiritual deliverance as well.
- † **[12: torn]** To live or die, Paul says, "I feel torn between the two"; that's how he would say it if he were American. As a Greek speaker, he literally says, "I am hard pressed between the two." The imagery is of the pressure of opposing military forces converging on you.
- Paul for himself would rather die and be with Christ, but he puts the needs of others first, so in the end he prefers to remain and minister to them. Serving the community outweighs his selfish desires. Again, I ask, is this how we think and live? Are you putting the needs of this community ahead of your own desires?
- † **[13: all]** Paul is convinced that God will allow him to keep ministering to the Philippians, that his release will result in their continued spiritual growth, and that they will have joy and greater cause to boast in Christ because Paul continues his ministry.
- Paul says he will continue with *all* of them. As he said earlier in the letter that he loved all of them and prayed for all of them even though some doubted him, here he trusts he will continue with all of them, a statement about God's plan for his release from jail but also about God's plan for their continued unity with each other and partnership with Paul, to complete the work God began in them. All of them will be stronger in faith and joy when Paul returns to them.
- † **[14: boast]** The last part of 1.26 is awkward, and translated several different ways in English Bibles.
- What is Paul saying here? The Greek word *καύχημα* was the act of boasting or the reason for boasting. Paul wants their reason for boasting in Christ to increase or abound [the Greek verb is *περισσεύω*, the same one he used when he prayed their love would abound]. Paul thinks his return to them will give them reason to boast in Christ: this could be simply that Paul was released from prison and able to return to them or it could imply that his ministry to them would help them grow, so they would boast more and more in Christ.
 - **[15: Jeremiah]** Take a look at something from the Jewish prophet Jeremiah. **Jeremiah 9.23-24 NLT: This is what the LORD says: "Don't let the wise boast in their wisdom, or the powerful boast in their power, or the rich boast in their riches. But those who wish to boast should boast in this alone: that they truly know me and understand that I am the LORD who demonstrates unfailing love and who brings justice and righteousness to the earth, and that I delight in these things. I, the LORD, have spoken!"**
 - As the Philippians grew spiritually, as they accepted their suffering and continued to embrace the gospel mission, they would understand better why they should boast in Christ. This is true for us too, right? Much of our anxiety and discontentment come from our focus on our struggles. If we accepted those struggles as expected aspects of life with Christ and focused

instead on the immense blessings we have in Christ, then we too would be singing praises, shouting in joy, resting in peace and contentment.

- I am still learning to apply this. I have been here a little over three years now. We have made some improvements to how the church functions and we praised God for several of us taking new steps of faith and growing both spiritually and in ministry. But there are times I doubt myself, times I am unhappy with how things are going, times I feel stress and anxiety. And then I realize that like the Philippians, I am focusing on the problems, and I am stressed that God is not quickly providing the physical deliverance I seek. I need to be more like Paul, not concerned so much with how things are going, simply trusting in God and seeking to do his work every moment, to realize spiritual development. Jesus said, in **Matthew 6.33 NLT**: **“Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.”** That’s a verse that can take so much weight off our shoulders!
- † **[16: map]** Paul was released in AD62. Did he visit Philippi again? We know from later letters to Timothy and Titus, that Paul visited Miletus and Troas [2 Timothy 4.13, 20]; also Crete [Titus 1.5]; and Macedonia [1 Timothy 1.3], the last of which would imply Philippi and Thessalonica, at least. By the time he wrote 2 Timothy, he was in prison again, and not expecting release [2 Timothy 4.6].
- † **[17: inclusio]** In the opening of the letter [1.1-11], Paul expressed confidence that God would ensure the Philippians continued to do the work of the gospel mission in partnership with Paul. This section began [1.12] with assurance that Paul’s imprisonment resulted in the advance [προκοπή] of the gospel mission. Now it ends [1.25-26] with assurance that Paul’s release is coming, for the sake of their progress [προκοπή] in their faith and the gospel mission. A little word play by Paul to tie this all together.

Conclusion

- † **[18: title]** Paul’s desire is for deliverance, and to him deliverance means empowerment to be the person God created and saved him to be, glorifying Christ in every moment of his life, including the moment of death.
 - In this part of the letter, Paul reveals his selfless heart in his willingness to suffer and sacrifice if it pleases God or helps others; he explains that his imprisonment has helped advance the gospel mission; and he shows the Philippians that suffering and death are not shameful, they are not signs of being cursed, but in fact suffering is what we might expect as part of the Christian life and in death we should see the final step in our deliverance.
 - Let’s pray that we can have these same attitudes, and thus have the same joy, peace, thankfulness, and contentment as Paul. . .