

Text: Philippians 1:12-30

¹²Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. ¹³As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. ¹⁴Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly. ¹⁵It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. ¹⁶The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. ¹⁸But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, ¹⁹for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. ²⁰I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²²If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. ²⁵Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me. ²⁷Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel ²⁸without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. ²⁹For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, ³⁰since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

Theme: Is this our Quandary?

“It’s hard to decide what I want.” We have all had that quandary in life. Should I get vanilla custard or the flavor of the day? Do I want pepperoni or sausage on my pizza? Should I get the striped shirt or the plaid one. I like them both. Such uncertainty is usually based on what we want. Paul’s quandary in our text, however, was different. It was based on what God wanted. Today I’d like to ask whether that is our quandary.

I. What was Paul’s quandary?

He was uncertain whether he would rather live to serve Christ or be with the Lord. Of course, the decision was God’s, but what would Paul prefer.

On the one hand he desired to live to serve Christ. At this time Paul was in prison in Rome. There was a good chance that He would be set free. (In the end, it is what happened.) Even as he was under house arrest, the Gospel was continuing to spread. The book of Acts ends with these words, “*For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.*” Paul could no longer move about to preach, but many people came to him to hear the Gospel. The soldiers who were guarding him also heard him preach, and many of them came to faith.

It became known throughout the whole imperial guard that he committed no crime. He was a prisoner for Christ. The way that the Gospel continued to spread despite his imprisonment encouraged the Christians in Rome to share the Gospel boldly. Even in his imprisonment Paul was able to serve his Savior. One of the ways that he served his Lord was to write letters from his imprisonment to the Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians the Laodiceans (Col 4:16), and to Philemon. Several of those letters have become a part of our New Testament.

But he was eager for his hearing before the emperor Nero to be over. There were so many things that he still desired to do. He wanted to return to Philippi and several congregations he had visited in the past to encourage them in their faith. He had a desire to go to new places, possibly even Spain. He was looking forward to his freedom, not for his own pleasure, but so that he could continue to serve our Lord. In his letter to Timothy we read that he got this wish. He spent a lot of time in Philippi and other cities in Macedonia, which is modern day Greece.

On the other hand Paul desired to depart this life and be with Christ. Paul's service to his Lord as an apostle was not easy. He endured false teaching and false accusations. He had been stoned, whipped, shipwrecked, and imprisoned. The crosses that he bore had been very heavy. He looked forward to the glory that the Lord had waiting for him in heaven. It was not glory to reward him for what he had done on this earth, but the glory that his Savior won for him by giving His innocent life on the cross for the forgiveness of Paul's sins. He says that his desire is to depart and be with Christ. There was a chance that he would be executed. Within 5 years, he would be arrested again during Nero's persecutions. This time he would be executed. In his 2nd letter to Timothy, which was shortly before his execution, he wrote, "*The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and bring me safe to His heavenly kingdom.*" (2 Tim 4:18) Paul looked forward to the glory of heaven. He looked forward to the resurrection of the dead and the new life to come. He wrote in Romans 8, "*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*" (Rm 8:18) In 1 Corinthians 15 he writes about the resurrection, "*Death has been swallowed up in victory.*" (1 Cor 15:54) In 1 Thessalonians 4 he writes, "*We will be with the Lord forever.*" On the road to Damascus, the Lord appeared to Paul, and it brought fear when Jesus asked, "*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?*" Paul was looking forward to the day when he would be called from this vale of tears and hear the words, "*Come, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.*" He longed to see Christ and live in His perfect peace and glory.

II. Can we relate to this quandary at all?

Is our first thought with regard to this life how we can serve God? Even as Christians, it is tempting to make life revolve around what we want and when we want things. We don't want any bad surprises. We don't want suffering. We might want to be popular or maybe we would rather be left alone. We want God to make our lives joyous and prosperous.

There is sometimes little thought as to how God can use us in His kingdom. What would we think if God's plan was that we would be unjustly arrested like Paul, because He would use our imprisonment to help many people come to faith? What would we think if God's plan was that an illness or weakness of ours would also lead many people to Christ? Do we look for ways that He is calling us to serve Him in our everyday lives by bringing Him glory and loving our neighbor or are our thoughts on how well we want our lives to go? Paul writes in verse 29, "*It is has been granted*

to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for Him, since you are going through the same struggle that you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.” Paul had his crosses to bear, and each of us as a Christian has a personal cross that we bear. Will we bear them patiently or do we try to avoid our cross? Do we even consider how we can serve God, especially in ways that are difficult?

Do we have a longing for our eternal life in Christ? Revelation 7 describes heaven this way, *“They are ever before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple. Never again will they hunger. Never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd. He will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”* We will serve our Savior for all of eternity without the crosses that we have in this life. We will live in His glory. The Bible describes the resurrection as an eternal wedding banquet, a renewed Garden of Eden or a victory party that lasts forever. It will be the most glorious thing ever. Our pain and suffering will be gone. Our bodies will be raised gloriously. There will be no more pain or sorrow or suffering. We will be with the Lord in His glory forever. But do we ever give that much thought?

III. How blessed it is however, when we have this quandary.

It was a blessed problem for Paul. He had been a persecutor of Christ’s people and of Christ Himself, but God called him. God forgave his sins and made Paul into one of His apostles. Things didn’t always go easily for Paul. They didn’t always go as he planned or in a way that was easy for him, but he could look back and see how the Lord used him for His glory. Paul also looked forward with confidence, knowing that God would still use him as long as he was on this earth, and that when his work was done, the Lord would also call him to His glory in heaven.

It is a blessed problem for us too. We thank God for the salvation that He has given to us in Christ. We were also sinners, but Christ died and rose for our salvation. He called our names and through faith in Him, He has forgiven all of our sins. As we follow Him, things haven’t always gone the way that we wanted. Sometimes our crosses have been heavy, but when we follow Christ, God uses every part of our lives for His glory and our good. As long as we live on this earth, He has a purpose for us, even when we don’t see it. The best example of that which I have seen in my ministry was a nearly 100 year old woman some years ago, who responded to almost nothing, except when I came. She would still say the Lord’s prayer with me, along with some Bible verses, and hymn verses. Each time I left that nursing home, someone from the staff would remark how much she perked up and how responsive she was during that devotion. Even in her greatest weakness, the Lord was still using her. It’s a blessing to know that the Lord is using us for good, but as Christians we also have our eyes on the goal of our eternal life with our Lord and all of His people.

Is this your quandary? Do you desire to serve God on this earth, but also desire your eternal life with Him in His glory? We share in Paul’s quandary when we trust firmly in God’s forgiveness and His eternal salvation in Christ. Such faith in His grace and mercy gives us both the desire to serve God now and forever in His glory. Amen.

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