

THEME: In Life, in Death—Christ!

Text: Philippians 1:18b-27 (EHV)

^{18b} Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, ¹⁹ because I know that this will turn out for my deliverance, through your prayer and the support of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. ²⁰ This matches my earnest expectation and hope that I will in no way be put to shame, but with all boldness, as always, so even now, Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ Yes, for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²² But if I am to go on living in the flesh, that will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet which should I prefer? I do not know. ²³ I am pulled in two directions, because I have the desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far. ²⁴ But, it is more necessary for your sake that I remain in the flesh. ²⁵ And since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and will continue with all of you, for your progress and joy in the faith. ²⁶ And so by my coming to you again, my goal is to give you even more reason to boast in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ Just conduct yourselves in a way that is worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come to see you or am absent, I may hear about you that you are standing firm in one spirit, contending together with one soul for the faith of the gospel.

Apple pie or cherry pie? Mountains or the ocean? Chocolate or caramel? Paper or plastic? Life is full of choices. Some of them difficult. Some of them not so much. Some of them have consequences. Some of them not so much.

What about the choice between living or dying? That doesn't seem like a very difficult choice at all, does it? Isn't it just common sense to choose living over dying every time? Isn't that what our very powerful self-preservation instinct screams out to us?

And yet, we hear the Apostle Paul in our text sound very “torn” over this choice between living and dying. He laments, **“Yet which should I prefer? I do not know. I am pulled in two directions...” (v. 22b-23).**

What's also surprising is the fact that Paul considers *both* of these choices—living and dying—to be good and advantageous options! So much so that he was having a hard time choosing which was better. How could he possibly consider both living AND dying to be a “win-win” situation? One word explains it all: Christ!

Despite the fact that Paul was in prison when he wrote these words; despite the fact that he was awaiting his upcoming trial in which he really didn't know if he was going to be set free or put to death he declares, **“I will continue to rejoice” (v. 18b)!** Paul was confident in Christ and His Holy Spirit that no matter what the outcome it would turn out for his **“deliverance” (v. 19)** and that **“Christ [would] be magnified in [his] body, whether by life or by death” (v. 20).** You see, Christ wasn't just a part of Paul's life. Christ was everything to him! Paul exclaims, **“Yes, for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” (v. 21).**

Paul's words and the attitude he expresses toward life and death in this text are an excellent example for every believer in Christ follow. **In Life, in Death—Christ!**

In Life—Christ. This was true for Paul and it is true for every believer because Christ is **life (John 14:6).** He is *true* life; *real* life. He is the “abundant life” (**John 10:10**) that He promises His sheep. In Christ life finds meaning; it finds purpose. In Him life finds fulfillment, satisfaction, and true joy.

Because Christ was Paul's life it changed his whole perspective on life—both the good times and the bad—and therefore, in Christ, his whole life changed! He was able to view his imprisonment in the light of Christ and how He could glorify Him and serve Him and His church through it. During his

imprisonment Paul, by inspiration, wrote several books of the New Testament, including this one, Philippians. Even his potential freedom and release from prison Paul looked forward to in the light of Christ. He saw that, not as an opportunity to be selfish and do what he wanted if he got released, but as an opportunity as a “free man” to serve others, to help strengthen their faith and joy in Christ. Paul writes in our text, **“But, it is more necessary for your sake that I remain in the flesh.”**²⁵ **And since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and will continue with all of you, for your progress and joy in the faith.”**²⁶ **And so by my coming to you again, my goal is to give you even more reason to boast in Christ Jesus.”** (v. 24-26).

Is Christ your **“life”**? Does He mean “something” to you, or does He mean everything to you? Is He part of your life, or is He your **life**? When Christ is your life it changes our whole perspective on life. We see life—both the good times and bad—through the “lens” of Christ and His cross. And therefore, in Christ, our whole life is changed! We can see our sufferings as opportunities to grow closer to Christ and to glorify Him, just like Paul did while he was in prison. We can be confident in the strength Christ will supply to us through His Holy Spirit to deliver us through our sufferings and work them out for our true good and our **“deliverance”** no matter what the outcome, just like He did with Paul.

When Christ is our life our thinking, our planning, our actions and our focus will be on Him and we will seek Him and His kingdom **“first”** (**Matthew 6:33**). Not only does Christ change our perspective and our **life** itself, He even changes our perspective on **death**—because He changed what death is for us!

Even **In Death—Christ!** Paul says in v. 21, **“to die is gain.”** Think about how that glorious, joy-filled Scripture passage only makes sense in Christ. After all, death is not **“gain.”** It’s not **“gain”** at all! It is loss! It is the greatest of losses. When a loved one dies we feel and experience a great loss in our life—not **“gain.”** But think of how death is changed in Christ because of His cross! Because Christ defeated death by His death on the cross Paul can say, **“To die is gain.”** Because of Christ’s resurrection, death for Paul, meant passing from this trouble-filled, sin-soaked life, so polluted with sorrow and pain, to life eternal in heaven **“with Christ, which is better by far”** (v. 23).

Incredibly, amazingly, **“to die is gain”** for us as well—because of Christ! We can approach death through the “lens” of Christ and His cross: calmly and fearlessly, like Paul did, and be ready to go and be with our Savior at any time. We know that because of His death and resurrection death now **“gains”** for us life forever in heaven with Christ! We know this is true for our loved ones who have died in Christ as well. Their death is **“gain”** in Christ because now they are safely and peacefully forever, **“with Christ, which,”** as Paul reminds us in our text, **is better by far”** (v. 23). In Christ, we **gain** the peace of knowing we will see Jesus and all the beloved believers in Christ again and will join them in the eternal bliss of heaven that Christ’s death **“gained”** for us!

Living or dying. As believers we can see how that was a difficult choice for Paul. In a sense it is a difficult choice for us—but for good reasons! For the believer in Christ—because of Christ—life and death are a “win-win.” Paul wrote in our Scripture reading from Romans, **“Indeed, if we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For this reason he died, rose, and lived, to be Lord of both the dead and the living.”** (Romans 14:8-9).

In Christ, our **life** is fulfilling, joyful service for as long as He has us on this earth. In Christ, our **death** is **“gain”** when He calls us to be with Him forever, **“which is better by far”** (v. 23). With **“the support of the Spirit of Jesus Christ”** (v. 19) may He move all of us to view our life and death like Paul did: In Christ! Amen.