

## BY LIFE OR BY DEATH

Text: Philippians 1:20b, 21: "...Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

Everyone west of Jerusalem should cherish these words (Acts 1:20) of the great apostle Paul. His desire was to go further into Asia preaching the Gospel and establishing churches, but in his own words, he declared that he and his company "...were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia" (Acts 16:6b). Shortly after the door closed in Asia, Acts 16:9 gives us this important information that there is now a door opening in Europe: "And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us." This is famously called by students of the Bible, "the Macedonian Call." For two millennia the people of God, and more especially, missionaries have referred to their personalized call from God in similar terms. I remember so well my own minister father using this term to describe his call to a new area of service. Acts 16:12 tells us of the first city in Europe that Paul began to preach and teach: "And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days." As revealed in this sixteenth chapter of Acts, we see a pattern for service and doctrine that has served as a harbinger and example to follow when beginning a New Testament work for God.

When Paul wrote these words he was imprisoned in Rome. He did not know the outcome of his imprisonment. He did not know whether he would live to see another day to preach and teach or if this imprisonment would ultimately lead to his death. Within four years Paul will have written his last words in Holy Writ (II Timothy). He chose (or, we should actually say, the Holy Spirit chose) the apostle to write these words to the Philippians. Listen to Paul's words describing these Christians: "For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God" (II Corinthians 8:3-5). In the Philippians he found a kindred spirit, in other words, a group of Christians who were willing to do whatever it takes to advance the Gospel of the Lord and Savior whom they loved more than life itself.

My prayer today is that we will join with Paul and Philippians with the same dedication that says, I shall serve the Lord "...whether it be by life or by death." The old adage may apply in the world in which we live: "Desperate times calls for desperate measures." It is believed this phrase originated with a saying of the ancient Greek physician Hippocrates, which appears in his Aphorisms: "For extreme diseases, extreme methods of cure, as to restriction, are most suitable."

And this could most definitely apply to us today as we also compare our situation to that of Judah's as described by the prophet in Isaiah 1:6a, "From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it...." In the opening words of Paul's letter, I believe we can impetus to be able to live with this kind of dedication.

## I. MAJOR ON MEMORIES THAT ENCOURAGE YOUR HEART.

Philippians 1:1-3

The words of Philippians 1:3 speak of the power of precious memories: "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you." In Philippians 1:7b, Paul went on to say, "...I have you in my heart...." I love what Dr. Ravi Zacharias said, "It's a remarkable thing what we can learn from a child if we just listen to them. G.K. Chesterton said he learned more from observing a nursery than he ever did in his philosophy lectures. I have a five-year-old grandson; his name is Jude. He has a phenomenal vocabulary. I don't know where he comes up with some of his words. But when he was just about three-and-a-half years old my daughter Naomi, his mother had lost her car keys in the house and couldn't find them. She stopped, slapped her forehead and said, 'I must be losing my mind.' And little Jude comes and stands in front of her and says, "Mommy, whatever you do, please don't ever lose your heart because I'm in there." That says it all; doesn't it? Little Jude need never fear; his mommy will never lose heart and therefore since her son is in there, she'll never lose him. Paul is affirming that he will remember everything about the church at Philippi because he has them in his heart.

## II. JOURNEY WITH JOYFUL UNDERGIRDING.

Philippians 1:4, 18; 2:16, 17,18, 28; 3:1, 3; 4:1, 4

Acts 27:17 says, "Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship...." At sea in great storms in ancient times, and even in modern times, ropes or cables were used as Commentator Adam Clarke wrote, "It is called frapping the ship. A stout cable is slipped under the vessel at the prow, which they can conduct to any part of the ship's keel; and then fasten the two ends on the deck, to keep the planks from starting: as many rounds as they please may be thus taken about the vessel. An instance of this kind is mentioned in Lord Anson's Voyage round the World. Speaking of a Spanish man-of-war in a storm: "They were obliged to throw overboard all their upper-deck guns, and take six turns of the cable round the ship, to prevent her opening. The same was done by a British line-of-battle ship in 1763, on her passage from India to the Cape of Good Hope."

The point I want to make is that life can become very tumultuous. It is the joy of the Lord that will carry us through. Nehemiah 8:10 emphasizes, "...for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

### III. CONTINUE IN THE CONFIDENCE THAT GOD WILL COMPLETE WHAT HE BEGINS.

Philippians 1:6

This is true of salvation. It is also true of service for Christ. Romans 8:31 says, "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" We read in Ecclesiastes 3:14, "I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him." And with these encouraging verses we can fulfill the command of I Corinthians 15:58: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

### IV. EXCEL IN EXCELLENCE.

Philippians 1:7-10

Philippians 1:10a says, "That ye may approve things that are excellent...." The word "approve" is the Greek word "dokimazo" which means to test, to allow, to discern, to examine, or to try. God's word is telling us there is an excellent way in which we are to test all ministry. The key to understanding this is found in I Corinthians 12:31: "But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way." After describing the gifts of the Holy Spirit, Paul says, there is a transcendent quality that supersedes even the gifts themselves. The very next chapter (I Corinthians 13) goes into detail describing this "more excellent way." And what is this way? It is the way of God's "agape" love.

### V. BE RESOLUTE IN RESOLUTION.

Philippians 1:20, 21

In Philippians 1:20 the apostle Paul declares by life or by death, he will serve the Savior. Then he says in verse 21, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." I believe we understand that death for the Christian is gain. This is what the Bible was promising in II Corinthians 5:8b, "...to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." We have a handle on "...to die is gain." But what does it mean to live is Christ? Johann Leonhard Dober and David Nitschmann, the two Moravian missionaries who were willing to sell themselves as slaves to reach slaves

give us what is perhaps the best glimpse of what "...to live is Christ" means. They gave these parting words to loved ones whom they did not know if they would ever see again: "May the Lamb that was slain receive the reward of His suffering."

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.