
TORN BETWEEN TWO

Good Morning! How are you doing? You know, never hesitate to ask questions if we are going too fast, or confusing you in any way. The goal, as we concluded our lesson yesterday, is that whether we live or whether we die, our purpose, in either one, is to glorify Christ. I wonder how often we think about glorifying Christ in our daily life? Do we give Him the honor and praise He is due? Paul certainly gives us some good things to think about, and be more intentional about.

As we start today's lesson, please read Philippians 1:21-26 again. Having looked at v. 21 yesterday, let's move on to Philippians 1:22-23, Paul says,

"but if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me;
and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions,
having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better."

Paul looks at life and knows that he may endure many more days under house arrest, chained. He may suffer more in the future, but still, he longs to stay and help the believers in Philippi. He also knows that if he were to die he would be in the very presence of the Christ whom he loves and serves. It's quite a quandary.

I think God has placed a "self-preservation" mode in each of us. We see the destruction that happens in others' lives when they lose all hope, or the will to live. But most of us have within us the desire to live. We think about the things that we'd like to experience before we die, we make bucket lists. When I was younger I wanted to live long enough to be married and have children. Then I wanted to live long enough to raise my children. I wanted to know my grandchildren. We each have these things that we build up in our minds until we desire them more than being in heaven. The old idea of "heaven can wait." Perhaps because this world is the only tangible

thing we've known, or perhaps it's because we have a misconception of what heaven is and really have no desire to play a harp for all eternity. Whatever the case, on the scale of here or there, somehow this world tips the scale and wins over our picture of what heaven has to offer.

Read 1 John 2:15-17, we read these verses before, but look again, what does God's word say about that?

In Paul's case, he had some added incentive to desire to be with Christ.

- 1) He was sitting in prison;
- 2) He had seen a vision of heaven.

Look up 2 Corinthians 12:1-7. What do you see taking place in these verses?

Is it any wonder that Paul desired heaven? Of course, don't we also have these incentives? We might say, well, Paul had a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus, he was blinded and spoken too. But haven't we gone through a similar conversion? Out of darkness and into the light by Him speaking to our heart? And I don't know about you, but there are times when this world (and the situations of it) do seem like a prison sentence. How many times have you found yourself saying, "Come quickly, Lord, come quickly!"? Also, we may not have had an actual vision of heaven, but God has certainly given us a picture of it in the Bible so that we know things that should draw us to heaven. The presence of God alone should evoke that desire.

The word desire is (epi-thu-mian) and it means *a craving or longing*. Paul had seen the glory of heaven and as a matter of principle, and of deep longing, he desired to be with Christ. Of course, he doesn't have a choice when that is since it is God who ordains the number of our days (Job 14:5) but it's still his utmost desire.

On the other hand, he also desires to stay and be with the Philippians. Hard-pressed, for sure. He longed for heaven and yet longed to remain here, he truly was torn betwixt the two. Paul's longing to stay comes from a different place than our "bucket lists" though because we see that he wasn't wanting to remain here for his own self, or his own enjoyment, or his own accomplishments, but vs. 24-25 tell us that for him to remain is for the good of those in Philippi. He deeply loved these people. And he is convinced that not only is he staying but he's staying for their benefit.

Read Philippians 1:25 - what are the two reasons Paul gives for staying:

1.

2.

Can you think of someone that you want to hang around this world for? Is it for the same reasons as Paul?

In Philippians 1:25, the word "continue" is 'para-me-noh' and means, to dwell alongside you. Paul has complete confidence that he will be spending time with the Philippians again, and he will do this for the furtherance of their growth, their progress, and for the joy in their faith.

For the furtherance of their progress - He's talking about helping them to grow spiritually as a pastor-teacher would. He wants to teach, to exhort, to encourage so that they will mature in Christ because he knows that with maturity comes joy.

Joy, there's that word again. He will remain with them, for their growth and look at the next phrase, "joy in the faith" (cha-ran)(taes)(pis-te-ohs). Paul is certain he will be returning to them to help them have joy, a joy that comes from the source of faith.

Real deep down, inner happiness comes when we experience a resting in faith. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ (Rom. 10:17). So, as Paul ministers to them, he will

"cut out a way for them to advance and will provide foundational teaching which will increase their faith and thus their joy."

Let me ask you a question - are you lacking joy? Do you have a deep down inner happiness that buffers the hard things in your life? If not, the answer is to learn, and then trust the Word of God. Plain and simple. If we try to conjure up joy apart from knowing God and His word, it will be shallow and fade with the first obstacle that comes in our path. But in Christ there is immeasurable joy. Unending joy, even when the world says it should be otherwise.

Paul is certain that he is meant to teach this church more about God, with the result that they will grow in maturity, maturity that leads to joy. Inexpressible joy.

And we come to the question again, as we did yesterday, what is God's plan for your life? In what way has He designed you to minister to others? Within the body of Christ what role has He designed you for? If you are here, you have a ministry of some sort. It may not be on a grand platform or before a large audience, it may be as simple as fulfilling the role He has placed you in right where you are (student, wife, mother, friend, teacher, encourager, etc.) but I can guarantee that the two-fold direction of Paul's life should be ours as well. Furthering a knowledge of Christ to those around us, and bringing them to rest in faith that brings joy.

Let's get practical, how can you fulfill those two roles in the lives around you?

God has a design for each of us, and we will remain until we either complete the plan, or we neglect that ministry. He has made Jesus Christ the head, but we, believers, are the body, and the body cannot function as it should if we are not fulfilling our role. We must do that in tandem with the Holy Spirit directing us in order for the body of Christ to function correctly.

How are you living your part of the body of Christ?

Look at v. 26 of Philippians 1, Paul is not seeking any praise for himself, he humbly points them back to Christ Jesus. If Paul is able to return to them he wants all the glory to go to Christ Jesus because Paul knows that its only through Him that it will happen, there's nothing in himself that can make it happen. God is the source of every good gift, the One that provides our joy.

He has purpose for your life. He has a plan just waiting to be fulfilled. And He has joy He wants to bless you with. If we can be of any help in this, we are here, for your "progress and your joy in the faith."

REVIEW

- ~ Paul says it's a hard choice when we look at staying here and helping the body of Christ function, OR going to be with the Lord.
- ~ That choice is not ours, we are simply to keep doing what God has called us to do
- ~ Real joy comes by resting in our faith
- ~ Are we living out God's plan for our life?
- ~ Does our life point others to Christ?