

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
January 12, 2020

**FREEDOM WHILE IN CHAINS**

Philippians 1:18-21

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Here are my two points:

- Paul trusted God for his liberation.
- Winning was Paul's only option.

**INTRODUCTION:** The church at Philipi was a positive church. It was a church that was growing, that was loving God and loving each other. Paul wrote to the church and encouraged them to keep on living for the Lord and doing the good things they were doing.

Last week at the end of my message, Paul noted that he was in chains. Being in jail had turned into an opportunity for Paul to share the Gospel. The elite palace guard, some 10,000 soldiers specifically selected to guard the emperor's interests – had heard the Gospel. Paul noted some other preachers had used the fact that he was in jail in some opportunistic way. We're not sure what that was exactly, but he didn't hold it against them. Instead, he rejoiced that the Gospel was being preached.

**PAUL'S TRUSTED GOD FOR HIS LIBERATION**

Paul was not counting on any person to set him free. He was beyond hoping that a person would come through for him. He was beyond putting his hope in people. He trusted in God alone to be his liberator.

**SCRIPTURE:** Philippians 1:18-19

*Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, <sup>19</sup>for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.*

Your translation may say “*that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer.*” I do not believe Paul was talking about his eternal salvation. The translation might not be as clear as it could be. What he meant was this: “Through your prayers and God’s provision, I’ll be vindicated.” Paul did not know what God’s provision would be, but he knew he’d be vindicated. Paul had accepted the fact that God’s provision for him might be to take him from this life.

**APPLICATION:** It would probably take a crisis for each of us to get to the point where we are totally dependent on God to be our liberator. Most of us are looking for something yet to happen... the next big thing.

- “If I can just get this bunch of bills behind me, then I’ll be free.”
- “If I can just a positive result from my lab work...”
- “If that person will come through for me like she said she would...”
- “If I can just get a good income tax refund check...”

Here’s what happens when we are looking to be liberated by things like that: they’ll never liberate us. There will always be another hurdle. Once one is jumped, then there is another.

**EXPLANATION:** Paul knew that God was his liberator. “Your prayers and God will liberate me.” Also notice that Paul doesn’t blame Satan for his circumstances. He could have easily done that. “That ol’ devil, he’s just making it hard for me.”

He was awaiting trial by Nero under some bogus charges by religious people. No matter what the outcome, Paul knew that he was already vindicated in God’s sight.

- Interestingly enough, Paul quoted Job 13:16 word-for-word, “*this will turn out for my deliverance.*”

**ILLUSTRATION:** Years ago, I was talking to a good pastor friend in the Bahamas. I told him about how some people I knew had let me down. He said, “Why are you surprised? The arms of flesh will fail you.” I needed that.

Something about those words convicted me I was trusting in people more than I should have.

**APPLICATION:** One of the verses in the song “Stand Up, Stand Up For Jesus” states –

Stand in His strength alone;  
The arm of flesh will fail you,  
Ye dare not trust your own.

Do not trust people to be your liberator. And do not trust your own plans. If it takes crisis after crisis for us to trust God to be our liberator, that’s what has to happen. Let’s not fight it so much!

## **WINNING WAS PAUL’S ONLY OPTION**

**SCRIPTURE:** Philippians 1:20-21

*I 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. <sup>21</sup> For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.*

- When Paul says “ashamed”- another translation here could be “disgrace.” Paul, even though he was a strong Christian, was concerned about having a good testimony. He was humble enough to know that he was only a man and that he might fail. Although he had been faithful in setback after setback, he knew he was still prone to sin. He didn’t predict that he would be faithful to the end, he hoped that he would be and would in no way be ashamed of his behavior or be a poor testimony for Christ.
- One commentator says a better translation of “ashamed” is “disillusioned,” meaning that Paul was concerned that he would have all his faculties during a trial.
- Paul’s main concern was not that he would die but that he would be faithful to the end.

Paul was an incredible guy. You just couldn’t stop him or keep him down. Throughout his writings Paul gave sports illustrations. He compared this life to running a race. He compared challenges to fighting the good fight.

Here in chapter 1, he doesn't give a sports illustration but he talks about winning. Paul's outlook on the Christian life, especially toward the end of one's life, is that of winning. If he were here today, he'd say, "No matter what happens, we will win with God. Because, whatever the circumstance, we should take it as an opportunity to share Christ." Paul's disposition was: "We are just going to keep on winning and winning and winning." Seeing everything as a win came from many years of seeing God at work in all kinds of circumstances.

**ILLUSTRATION:** I think of a couple I know who are having a struggle with their business. If things are great, they give God the glory. If things are not, they say it is an attack from Satan. They haven't grown enough in their faith to understand that God is God of the good times as well as the bad times. He is God no matter the circumstances. I hope they'll see it, but I am not sure they will. They've become so accustomed to blaming things they don't understand on Satan that they have sort of atrophied in their thinking.

**EXPLANATION:** It's hard to say you are winning when you are going through a difficult time. In fact, it might seem like false hope. When Paul said to live is Christ and to die is gain, what did he mean? Later in the following chapters, he talks more about that. I've read here and there about the meaning of this, and I am not really satisfied with what I've read. Let me explain it my way.

Let's break it apart word by word:

- "To live" – the infinitive verb
- "Is" – the present form of "to be" ...not has, not will be, but is... the current state of things.
- "Christ" – the risen Lord

**ILLUSTRATION:** Do you remember the childhood word game when two people would say the same thing at the same time, and someone calls "jinx"? Sometimes both say "jinx" and the one who says it faster wins. Sometimes it's "jinx" then "jinx" again...and someone ends it by saying "jinx infinity". Some of our oldest couples probably did that on their way to church this morning! This silly word game is a way for us to get the final word, a challenge for one to try to top another's word.

**EXPLANATION:** When Paul penned this, or if he was dictating it, he was looking for the strongest possible word to insert. I can see it happening like this... “To live is....great, to die is even better. No, no, hmm let’s see...to live is fantastic...no, no...why do I live? Because of Christ, the risen Lord. Why am I in chains? Because of Christ, the risen Lord. Who will set me free either in this world or the next? Christ, the risen Lord! Who has already set me free from the penalty of sin? Christ, the risen Lord. Hmm...I need the strongest word here. To live is *great*, to live is *greater*...to live is...*greatest* – nah that isn’t strong enough.” So Paul interjected the highest possible word to describe his state of being while alive: Christ! He used “Christ” as an adjective! “To live is...Christ!” And if that’s not enough, dying is even better.

He chose the highest possible word to describe his state of being while alive. To live is Christ – one of the most loaded statements in the Bible.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Many of you know the name Tony Evans, pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Church in Texas for 40 years. His wife passed away a few weeks ago. At her funeral, their son, Jonathan Evans, spoke.

- He said that many people prayed for his mother’s healing but he came to realize that because God didn’t answer their prayers their way didn’t mean that God didn’t answer their prayers anyway.
- He continued: there are always only two answers to your prayers.
  - Either she was going to be healed, or she was going to be healed.
  - Either she was going to live, or she was going to live.
  - Either she was going to be with family, or she was going to be with family.
  - Either she was going to be well taken care of, or she was going to be well taken care of.
  - The two answers to prayers about his mother’s healing were “yes” and “yes”.
  - We just don’t know which yes it’s going to be.

**EXPLANATION:** Paul was diverted off course and shipwrecked three times... and he saw God at work. He was beaten three times and saw God at work. He was attacked by thieves, was hungry, thirsty, he almost died from exposure – and he saw God at work.

He was completely obsessed with the truth that he was inseparable from God's love.

In jail, he was awaiting a trial that may have meant life or death. The Greeks believed death was a blessing because it freed the soul from the body. I want to be clear that's not what Paul meant. What he meant was that neither life nor death could separate him from his union with Christ. Paul believed that Christ had transformed life and that he had transformed death and that God's love permeated both!

To gain at death meant to have even more of the risen Lord than he was experiencing while alive. To live is Christ. To die is gain. Do you see that this morning?

He did not say, "to live is Christ, and then there is soul sleep." He did not say "to live is Christ and then you go to purgatory to pay for your sins." No! He believed when the believer dies, he or she sees Christ right then.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Occasionally I'll hear a song that has such bad theology, I can't believe it was ever recorded. There is one such song about a person who dreamed he went to heaven and people from the Bible were along the road as he looked for Jesus. When we get to heaven, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Mark, and Timothy are not going to be in the way. It's a tear-jerker of a song, but it's poor theology because when we get to heaven, we'll see Jesus. II Corinthians 5:8 says "*Absent from the body, present with the Lord.*"

**CONCLUSION:** Let me ask you...do you trust God to be your liberator? Or are you trusting other people? Are you trusting only yourself? Do you see winning as your only option?

Having a relationship with Christ will give you a new perspective on life. This is what the scripture calls the new birth. Being born again into the family of God, because of what Christ has done for us.

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