

TO LIVE IS CHRIST

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

Joy Triumphs Over Suffering

An incident is told of an artist who had conceived in his mind a great picture that he meant to be the masterpiece of his life. He was working on a large canvas, putting in the drabs and grays that were to compose the background, when a friend entered unnoticed. The artist worked on with enthusiasm, not aware of the onlooker's presence. Finally, happening to turn, the artist saw him and exclaimed, "What do you think of this? I intend it to be the greatest work I have ever done." His friend burst into laughter and replied, "Why, to be frank, I don't think much of it. It seems to me to be only a great daub." "Ah," replied the artist, at once sensing the situation, "you cannot see what is going to be there. I can."

So it is with God our Father who sees in each of His children what will fully be revealed when we stand before our Lord. So often, we see only the present suffering and forget the coming future glory. H.A. Ironside explains, "But in the day of Jesus Christ when all shall be manifested, every believer will be conformed to the image of God's blessed Son." What a day of rejoicing that will be!

Always remember how joy in the Lord triumphs over our present suffering. Let's begin with Paul's prayer for his beloved friends.

Paul's Prayer for The Philippians

Read Philippians 1:8-11 (ESV) ⁸ For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. ⁹ And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Paul told the Philippians that God was His witness – the Lord knew that Paul's heart was yearning for his friends at Philippi. The same Lord who understood Paul's heart understands our hearts as well. When we think of Paul's love for the Philippians, let's remember that Christ's love was channeled through His servant, Paul. Paul wrote in **Romans 5:5 (ESV)** ⁵ ...God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. When we permit God to perform His 'good work' in us, then we naturally grow in our love for one another. Thinking of our recent loss of our beloved brother in Christ, Dan Hiser, I believe this is why Chaplain Dan was beloved by so many – we all felt God's love channeling to us through Dan. Dan like Paul was displaying Christ's affection.

I believe like Paul, Dan would tell us: *it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more.* How can we tell that we truly abound in love for other Christians? For one thing, we are concerned about them. The believers at Philippi were concerned about Paul. We will study later how the Philippians sent Epaphroditus to minister to him. Paul, on the other hand, was just as concerned about his friends at Philippi, especially when Epaphroditus became ill and could not return to them right away.

Paul not only prayed that the Philippians would abound in love but that they would abound in knowledge and discernment. As we walk with the Lord, many believers having difficulty responding in love while at the same time maintaining good judgment. As we pray for our friends in Christ, let's follow Paul's example and pray like he did when he said: *it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment,*

Christian love is not blind love. Christian discernment is a mark of maturity and growth in Christ. Christian love, knowledge, and discernment help us to choose what is excellent. Paul wrote in *1 Corinthians 12:31 (ESV)* ³¹ *But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.* The *excellent way* is living a life of love – love for Christ and love for others. A life of love will bring joy to us and those around us even in the midst of suffering.

Pioneers Wanted!

Read Philippians 1:12-18 (ESV) ¹² *I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel,* ¹³ *so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.* ¹⁴ *And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.* ¹⁵ *Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will.* ¹⁶ *The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel.* ¹⁷ *The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.* ¹⁸ *What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice,*

Paul said: *I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.* What happened to Paul in his work for the Lord certainly did not lead him to the 'good life' on this earth. So, why should we expect to reap rewards on this earth for serving the Lord when the Apostle Paul did not?

Paul's desire was to preach the gospel in Rome. When Paul finally got there, he was not there as a preacher – he was there as a prisoner. But, he did not allow even that to steal his joy.

Paul's discernment brought him joy no matter the circumstances. Paul had the attitude that if his circumstances promoted the gospel, that was all that mattered! The idea of advancing or furthering the gospel comes from a Greek military term referring to the army engineers who went before the troops for the purpose of opening the way into new territory. We might say, they

were ‘clearing the road’. They were ‘pioneers.’ Instead of considering himself confined as a prisoner, Paul considered his circumstances as opening new areas of ministry. However, the scope of Paul’s understanding the impact of his ministry never took into account the fact that his own writings to the Philippians and others were destined to speak God’s Word to believers for over 2,000 years.

Even in Paul’s day there were both sincere and insincere preachers and teachers. Paul’s aim was to glorify Christ and get people to follow Him; his critics’ aim was to create their own great following – like we still see some doing today. Instead of asking, ‘Have you trusted Christ?’ they asked, ‘whose side are you on—ours or Paul’s?’ Paul was able to rejoice that no matter what the motive – *Christ was being preached!* All that mattered was the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus!

Are you resentful of where you are in life? Don’t be discouraged by your place of service for the Lord. Whether you are in an actual prison or a place that feels like one, God wants you to serve Him faithfully and joyfully no matter what. When we quote **2 Corinthians 9:7**, (*for God loves a cheerful giver*) we most often think of financial giving. But, cheerful giving goes way beyond finances. Paul was a cheerful giver – a joyful giver – giving of himself so that Christ would be magnified and glorified. Paul had a ‘single mind’ for the cause of Christ. Wiersbe says, “When you have the single mind, you look on your critics as another opportunity for the furtherance of the Gospel. Like a faithful soldier.”

Read Philippians 1:19-21 (ESV) ¹⁹ *for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance,* ²⁰ *as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.* ²¹ *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*

Never hesitate to ask for the prayers of God’s people. Asking does not show a lack of strength. Paul was a ‘prayer warrior’ himself and yet he relied on the prayers of the people of God. Even when we are confident that the Lord hears and answers our prayers, there are those times when we can barely pray. And yes, we know that the Holy Spirit is praying for us, but we gain courage and strength from knowing that other believers are interceding on our behalf and it becomes a tremendous blessing and encouragement. As always, it was Paul’s prayer that Christ would be honored in his body – whether he lived or whether he died.

This was not Paul’s final imprisonment in Rome. But he didn’t know that at the time. Awaiting trial, he knew he could either be released or executed. However, he trusted Christ to work it out for his deliverance one way or the other. Paul’s greatest prayer concern was that when he stood trial, he would be able to speak out courageously. He didn’t want to wind up ashamed because of his own actions. Whether he lived or died, he wanted to exalt Christ. As it turned out, he was released from this imprisonment but arrested again two or three years later. Only faith in Christ could sustain Paul in such adversity.

Paul said: *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* American pastor, William L. Pettingill said that gain is always more of the same thing. If to live is Christ, then to die would be more of Christ. It means to go and be with Him.

Patrick McCown was serving as the Maximum Security Unit chaplain when Dan Hiser along with several others began First Baptist Church's prison ministry there. Upon hearing of Dan's passing, McCown wrote an email that serves as a perfect illustration for this lesson.

McCown wrote: I just returned to the Unit to see the email concerning Dan's passing. Tuesday was one of the darkest days in the history of ADC Chaplaincy. We have lost a giant of the Christian faith and a true friend to everyone in this agency. Dan embodied everything the Bible says about servanthood. His contagious smile and his hugs came from a place inside his soul that filled with the kind of genuine love that only Christ can give. His generous nature was a gift from heaven to a culture where too much of the time we are territorial and protective of our resources. Dan reminded us that everything is the Lord's and we are just stewards. Dan was not just called to prison ministry, his life was a ministry every day everywhere he went. Dan and I worked together very closely at the Maximum Security unit and there were some brutal days during my tenure there. God could not have sent us anyone more qualified to be a spiritual first responder. There were some blessed days too! I have a picture of Dan in the summertime on the yard at the Maximum security unit where we were having a baptismal service. He had just baptized an inmate and his shirt was covered with water. Dan had an expression on his face that is priceless. He would not have been more happy if he had been given a million dollars or won a marathon! Dan Hiser lived to win people to his Lord and that day at the baptismal pool is an memory that will always challenge and encourage me to keep the main thing the main thing. Our prayers are with "Momma Jean" and the Hiser family today. Their story is a love story in itself.

The best memorial we can give Dan is to make a fresh commitment to shake every hand we can reach and hug every neck that will let us and then ask that person what we can do to help them no matter who they are or where they are. As long as we do that Dan Hiser's legacy lives on. I look forward to that glorious day when I will see my friend again. I am sure he will embrace me and we will shed some tears of joy and then in true Hiser fashion he will turn me toward the throne and point there and say "Don't thank me....Thank HIM! It's all because of Jesus!"

To live is Christ – to die is gain!