

Philippians 1:18b-21

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/phil/phil-1/philippians-118b-21/>

Paul rejoices even though he is imprisoned, even though some people are preaching the gospel for selfish reasons. He views his circumstances as positive, because they embolden him to continue to preach Christ with all his strength. Whether he is executed or freed, he will exalt Christ, and will not forsake his calling. If he lives, Paul gets to continue to preach Christ. If he dies, he gets to be with Christ in glory. Either circumstance is favorable.

Paul has been discussing those who preach the gospel while he is imprisoned, noting that some do it from selfish ambition, while others do it from a motive of love. But Paul has asserted that he simply rejoices that the gospel is being spread. He repeats again *Yes, and I will rejoice*. Paul gives a reason for his rejoicing, saying *for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance*. The word translated *deliverance* is the Greek word “soteria” which is often translated “salvation.” As always with the word “saved” or “salvation,” context answers the question “Who/what is delivering who/what from who/what?” Paul could be speaking here of being delivered from prison. But this does not seem to fit the context of the competing preachers.

It seems more likely that in the second statement of rejoicing, saying *Yes, and I will rejoice*, Paul is switching subjects to a new reason for rejoicing. Not only is Paul rejoicing because the mission of the gospel is being accomplished by others (regardless of their motive), Paul now rejoices that *my deliverance will come through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope*. It seems perhaps that Paul’s logic is linking his distress at the hand of competing preachers with the prayers being offered on his behalf by the Philippian believers. And Paul is saying that he believes his *deliverance* will come through those prayers, *according to his earnest expectation and hope*.

We would naturally think that Paul’s primary concern for *deliverance* is to be delivered from prison. However that does not seem to be the case here. Rather Paul’s desire is *that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death*. What Paul desires to be delivered/saved from is the *shame* of shirking his stewardship of the gospel. Paul desires *boldness*. He desires that *Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body*. This is a common theme with Paul. An example is in 1 Corinthians 9, where Paul describes the great lengths he has gone to in order to win the great prize of life by willingly serving Jesus with all his might, bringing his body into submission, as an Olympic athlete does during their training. Paul desires to have *boldness* in his witness, and to have *Christ be exalted in his body*. The phrase *exalted in my body* likely refers to the entire breadth of Paul’s life and work.

This gives us an excellent peek into the inner perspective of the Apostle Paul. He is in prison. He does not know whether Emperor Nero will set him free, or condemn him to death. Even so, Paul is preoccupied with being delivered from shirking his ministry calling. He wants prayer to help deliver him from doing anything for his own comfort, or allowing anything to get in the way of him giving himself over to the full obedience of Christ to the fullest possible extent, including

his entire *body*. This will include becoming a martyr, if God so desires (and eventually, that will be his lot).

Paul sums up his attitude thusly: *For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain*. Paul has *all boldness* for a very practical reason: he views dying as *gain*. If he dies, he goes into the presence of Christ, and fully trusts that all his service is waiting for him there, like a deposit of treasure (2 Timothy 1:12). What is there to fear if dying is *gain*? The word translated *gain* can also be translated “profit” or “advantage.” Paul apparently had gotten a preview of heaven, so had a taste of what it would be like. Although he was not permitted to speak much of it, it was apparently sufficiently compelling that he thought it would be a substantial “promotion” to die and go to heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2-5).

On the other hand, Paul’s perspective was that *to live is Christ*. So long as Paul was on this earth, all he found worth living for was to serve Jesus. This is perfectly reasonable, if you choose the perspective Paul had chosen. Paul noted that anything that could be gained in this world was fleeting, and would not bring true fulfillment. The richest and most powerful man in the world was the Roman emperor. By some counts, thirteen of them were assassinated by the praetorian guard, who were assigned to protect them.

Paul the prisoner was rejoicing and content, glad of the opportunity to serve Jesus, and knowing death would be a profitable enhancement for an eternal treasure. Paul is in prison, under house arrest, waiting to see Emperor Nero, at that time likely the wealthiest and most powerful man on earth. It is a great irony and validation of Paul’s attitude that Nero will later commit suicide to avoid being flogged to death, after being declared a public enemy, while Paul is venerated throughout the generations, and studied for his great work in the gospel.

Biblical Text

Yes, and I will rejoice,¹⁹ for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,²⁰ according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

²¹ **For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.**