

Philippians 1:18-26 – ⁸But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, ¹⁹for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance ²⁰I 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. ²¹For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²²If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. ²⁵Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.

Introduction – *For Me to Live is Jesus?* Does this seem like a strange hymn to be singing today? It is in the “Death and Burial” section of our *Christian Worship* hymnbooks. Certainly fitting to sing on the day of a funeral, but why sing it today?

Well, the obvious answer is that the title *For Me to Live is Jesus* and the words that follow it come directly from the section of God’s Word we are looking at today. The second answer is that the point of the hymn and the point of this section of scripture is that we as Christians can have confident joy even when we are faced with death. And how often are we faced with death? Really, every day. As much as we might like to avoid it, we are faced with it. Sometimes it comes and stares us right in the face. Sometimes it lingers around, always over our shoulder. But it is there. It is real.

But these words aren’t just about death. The other point of this section of God’s Word is that we can have confident joy even when we are faced with life. The Apostle Paul looks forward to both life and death: “*For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.*” And so he provides for us the answer to the question:

What is Every Christian’s “Win-Win” Situation?

I. We Win in Life Because We Get to Live for Christ!

II. We Win in Death Because We Get to Live with Christ!

I. We Win in Life Because We Get to Live for Christ!

So maybe the question pops into your mind: Why doesn’t it seem like we are winning in this life? I would think that anyone in the position that Paul was in would have thought that. His journey through life had taken him to prison. He was wrongly accused of breaking the law of the people of Israel and he was arrested and then he sat and he sat. For a number of years he sat, awaiting a trial before the court of the Roman Emperor. His imprisonment took him from Jerusalem to a city called Caesarea to a ship and after enduring a shipwreck he eventually got to Rome, where he sat and waited. While he waited he took the opportunity to write this letter the joyful Christians living in Philippi. And although he is chained and confined unable to spread the good news about Jesus from city to city, he is thankful and grateful to God and he knows he is in a “win-win” situation. Why?

He was fairly confident that the court would find him innocent. Instead of being upset about his unjust treatment, he looks ahead. His evaluation of his situation was this: “*It is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. ²⁵Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.*” Paul looks forward to being set free so that he can visit Philippi again and teach them more of God’s Word, for their progress and joy in the faith. The word “joy” appears again and again in Philippians as Paul feels the joy of God’s love and forgiveness and as Paul encourages the faithful in Philippians to be filled with the joy of Christ.

You and I may not have felt like such winners if we were in Paul’s shoes. Our sinful nature so often leads us to focus on what we don’t have. For Paul, what he didn’t have was his freedom, his opportunity to fulfill his job as a missionary (although he certainly shared the love of Christ with even the prison guards.) What we “don’t have” leads us to think that we “can’t do.” “If I don’t have enough money, if I don’t have enough time, if I don’t have the right words, if I don’t have the right abilities, I’m a loser and my life is no good.”

The devil can use those thoughts to make us feel worthless, like a part of the body of Christ that might as well be cut off because we are no good to anybody anyway. We may have a particular way in mind that we want to serve God and if we can’t serve God in that way, then we think we can’t serve at all. We may have an unrealistic view of our lives as Christians. Sinners we are, weak and unworthy, yes! But worthless? Never!

Look at how valuable you are. *"If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me."* Is that just for the apostle Paul? Is he the only one blessed by God with the opportunity to serve in God's kingdom? No. Even in life we are in a situation where we are the winners, because Paul's motto is our motto: *"For to me, to live is Christ."* What is your life about? It's about Jesus Christ who carried on in spite of the opposition he faced and the temptation he faced and did everything perfectly as God wanted him to. Perfectly. You live as a winner because of him who saved you. Your life is a life freed from sin's guilt and a life where you are free to offer your daily prayers and the sacrifice of your entire self and your entire schedule as a thank you gift to Christ who loved you.

So as a Christian, *your* time for fruitful labor in Christ is now. Love your family. Do good to those around you, whatever situation you find yourself in, because you have been connected to Christ by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Jesus says, *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit."* (John 15:5) Let your heart and mind be eager to seize the job God puts in front of you today, because, *"For me to live is Christ"*. It's not, *"For me to live is me."* Our life isn't about living with selfish motives. Life in Christ is not about how much temporary pleasure we can enjoy each day. You are living today as a Christian who has already been given full, satisfying life through your Lord and Savior. Though you may not feel like you have won it all, forget what your eyes see and your ears tell you and trust in the promise of God that you have eternal life waiting for you as the prize.

II. We Win in Death Because We Get to Live with Christ!

It reminds me of an article I read about the victims of the West Virginia coal mine disaster back in early April. A 61 year old man named Benny Willingham was one of the victims. His sister talked about him in the article: *"He loved the Lord, and in church the other day, he thanked the Lord for saving his soul, and he thanked him for watching over him in the mines for over 30 years, and he said, 'If he takes me tomorrow, I've had a good life,' "* she said. (<http://www.cnn.com/2010/US/04/06/mine.explosion.reaction/index.html?hpt=T1>) This man recognized the blessings he had received from God, that God had saved his soul and had watched over and protected him in his dangerous line of work. So he could face each day with confidence and joy, whether he was faced with life or death.

It's great to see that confident joy even when faced with death. But so often, isn't it also the case that we feel like we are going to be losing something when we die? Death, in many ways, seems like the ultimate defeat. It can be scary because we can't see what the next step is. Philosophies and religions deal with death in different ways. Some will pass it off as just part of the cycle of life. Some will say that the spirit inhabits a new being. Some will say that when a person dies they fade into nothingness.

Death is in reality, the one thing in life that we can least control. It is the unavoidable destiny of every human being, regardless of how healthy our eating is, how much sleep we get, how much exercise we have or how good our DNA is. In our world that foolishly seeks the perfect human life – a goal we can never achieve – we must confess the truth of God's Word that no matter how peaceful, beneficial, kind, and generous your life here on earth is, no matter how hard your work for your own good and the good of our human race, you will one day close your eyes for the last time and your heart will stop beating and your brain will stop functioning.

God says this is his curse on sinful human beings. To live forever in perfection would be great! That's God's plan. But to live forever with corruption and evil. How terrible! So what is left? We live for a short time (from 0-100 years or so) and that is our time to get to know the love of God through Christ Jesus. YES! Life is short and death is real, but we win even in death because we will get to live with Christ.

God changes our view of death, that looming curse on all people. He takes away the fear of death by having his Son come and lift off that curse, like pulling off the burden of a great debt that we owe to someone. Jesus Christ attacked death head on and he won. It may not have been obvious when he cried out "It is finished!" after he suffered for our sins on the cross., but it was sure obvious when the women found the grave of Christ empty and then Christ himself appeared to them and his voice of comfort chased away their fears.

Some may think Paul is strange when he says *"I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far"*, but we don't think so, do we? Isn't that what deep in our hearts we long for? We know that Jesus Christ is our Savior. He is our hope and joy and confidence in life and whatever we do, we want to do for him, to give him glory. Paul was concerned about this in his trial. *"I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance²⁰I 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."*

Some people accuse Christians of being too eager for death, so they miss out on all the opportunities to do good in life. I guess I would encourage you, Christians, don't be eager for *death*. Paul was not eager for *death* the way that some people want to run away from life because the problems are too great or the opportunity to serve God each day is too overwhelming. Don't be eager for a horrible thing like *death*. But be eager for what is beyond death. As life here on earth is all about living *in* Christ and *for* Christ and *because of* Christ, so life beyond death is all about living *with* Christ. Those

who die in Christ have not lost and are not losers. We are winners, enjoying the final victory over weakness and sin and death and the devil.

Conclusion: Sometimes in a game show, the winner gets a choice between one or more incredibly valuable prizes. Maybe it's the choice between a brand new Lexus and a Caribbean Vacation. Do you get a similar feeling from Paul as he wrote these words? Regardless of what was going to happen to him, he wasn't going to lose out on anything. Either he would get to continue preaching the gospel and the Holy Spirit would bring more people to faith through his ministry, or he would reach the end of his time on earth and go and be with Jesus. Truly, a "win-win" situation! Regardless of what is going to happen in your life today, you are not going to lose out on anything. Through Christ Jesus your Savior, every situation you find yourself in is a "win-win" situation. Though you may not see and feel the wonderful forgiveness and peace with God through Jesus Christ, be glad because God says that they are yours to keep forever. Amen.