

TRUE DELIVERANCE

Philippians 1:19-21

In **Philippians 1:12-26**, Paul explains his imprisonment for the church at Philippi. It is a highly biographical passage marinated in deep spiritual insight. In verses 12-18, Paul looks back and recounts how the overruling providence of God was at work through his adverse circumstances and personal opposition. In verses 19-26, Paul looks ahead and expresses his faith in the overruling providence of God to continue to work in spite of his uncertainties about his future.

Verse 18 is the hinge upon which Paul shifts from the past to the future. It begins with Paul's response to those who preached Christ with unworthy motives, hoping to make things more difficult for him: "*What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.*" Verse 18 ends with Paul's response to whatever will happen next: "*Yes, and I will rejoice.*" Paul was under house arrest and awaiting trial. He did not know if he would be released or martyred. Yet Paul was determined to rejoice. How? Verse 19 answers: "*for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance.*"

The word deliverance translates the Greek word commonly translated "salvation" in the New Testament. But this text is not about the forgiveness of sins. We are not saved by what we suffer for Christ. We are saved by what Christ suffered for us. Salvation is by grace through faith in Christ, plus or minus nothing. So what is Paul talking about? There are two schools of thought. One is that Paul is talking about eventual deliverance from his imprisonment. The other is that Paul is talking about ultimate deliverance in, through, after his death. The ambiguity is the point. Paul is saying he will be delivered either way – if he walks out of prison or is carried out.

What does it mean to be delivered? True deliverance is the ability to rejoice in spite of life's uncertainties, trusting that the Lord will cause your situation to work out for your good. In **Philippians 1:19-21**, Paul testifies about the assurance, ambition, and advantage of true deliverance.

I. THE ASSURANCE OF TRUE DELIVERANCE

Verse 19 says, "*For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ that will turn out for my deliverance.*" Paul awaited trial in Rome. The outcome was uncertain. Yet he claims, "I know." It is not divine revelation. It is the intuitive knowledge of personal conviction. This distinguishes the believer's perspective on life from the world. FREDRICK BUECHNER is right: "A Christian isn't necessarily any nicer than anybody else. Just better informed." Others in Paul's situation would have concluded it was the end. Paul said, "I know this will turn out for my deliverance." Paul was not confident he would be delivered because of his own resolve or resources. According to verse 19, Paul trusted God would work on his behalf through both human and divine means.

A. THE PRAYERS OF THE SAINTS

Paul was a man of prayer. In **Philippians 1:3-4**, Paul says to the church: "*I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy.*" In verses 9-11, he gives a report of his intercession for the Philippians. And Paul was confident that prayer would lead to his deliverance. But his confidence was not based upon his prayers. Paul knew he would be delivered because the Philippians prayed for him. They did not have political influence, military strength, or financial resources to help Paul. But they had the supernatural power of intercessory pray. In **Genesis 19**, Lot was delivered from the destruction of Sodom because his uncle, Abraham, prayed for him in **Genesis 18**. **Job 42:10** says, "*And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job, when he prayed for his friends.*" And Paul knew he would be delivered because the Philippians were praying for him.

This is why you need to be a participating member of a local church. There will be times when your hope of deliverance will be directly tied to your confidence that godly people are praying for you. Are you in fellowship with the church? I did not ask about how regularly you attend services or how generously you give or how attentively you listen to my sermons. I asked are you in good fellowship with your brothers and sisters in Christ. Here's a good way to measure it: Is there anyone in a difficult situation that is resting their hopes on the fact that you are praying for them? This should be a homework assignment you take from this sermon. Write down the names of three people you know that are going through a difficult period. And make a personal commitment to pray for them. And as you have opportunity, encourage them by letting them know that you are praying for them.

B. THE HELP OF THE SPIRIT

Verse 19 says, "*I know that through your prayers the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance.*" A.W. TOZER lamented that if the Holy Spirit was taken out of the world, many churches would continue with business as usual without noticing the difference. God forbid! When you put your faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, God the Holy Spirit takes up complete and permanent residence in your heart. **Romans 8:9b**, "*Anyone who does not have the Spirit of God does not belong to him.*" If you have been born again, God the Holy Spirit lives within you. The text calls him "*the Spirit of Jesus Christ.*" This is a subtle reference to the Trinity.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. And Christ gives the Holy Spirit to believers to help us. Paul knew he would be delivered because of the help of the Holy Spirit. *Help* translates a Greek verb that means to support a chorus group. It is the term from which we get our word "choreograph." It referred to a wealthy benefactor who financially supported a theater stage group. Paul uses the word here to speak of the help of the Holy Spirit. Paul was confident the Holy Spirit would keep

the show going. ALEC MOTYER comments: "God not only rules our lives from the throne, but he also sustains our lives from within."

A.J. GORDON, one of the founders of the Gordon-Conwell Divinity School, was out walking one day. Looking across a field, he saw beside a house what looked like a man pumping furiously at a hand pump. As Gordon watched, the man continued to pump rapidly. He seemed tireless, pumping on and on, up and down, without slowing up in the slightest. It was a remarkable sight. Gordon started to walk toward it. As he got closer, he could see it was not a man at the pump, but a wooden figure painted to look like a man. The arm that pumped so rapidly was hinged at the elbow and the hand was wired to the pump handle. The water was pouring forth, not because the figure was pumping it. It was an artesian well. The water was pumping the man.

II. THE AMBITION OF TRUE DELIVERANCE

In verse 19, Paul states the means of his expected deliverance. In verse 20, Paul explains the motives behind his expected deliverance: "*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." Eager expectation translates a Greek term that means, "to look for something with an outstretch head, looking away from everything else." That was Paul's spiritual posture. He was on tiptoes with anticipation. Likewise, he had hope. Christian hope is more than wishful thinking. It is spiritual assurance rooted in faith. **Hebrews 11:1** says, "*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*" This was Paul's spiritual disposition. He had an eager expectation that was the result of his hope in God. And his eager expectation was focused on Christ, not himself. This is the Christ-exaltation ambition of true deliverance. It is for you. But it is not about you. Paul desire for deliverance was motivated by two priorities.

A. MAY I NEVER LET CHRIST DOWN.

Paul begins verse 20 by stating his ambition in negative terms: "*It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not at all ashamed.*" Paul had a high theology of shame. In **Romans 1:16**, Paul says, "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*" In **2 Timothy 1:12**, Paul says, "*But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me.*" In **2 Timothy 2:15**, Paul says, "*Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handing the word of truth.*"

Paul ambition to live without shame was not about avoiding personal humiliation. Paul had already experienced much of that in his life and ministry. And he would experience much more before it was all over. Paul's concern was greater than a desire to avoid embarrassment before others. Paul did not want to be

embarrassed before God. You can be a great success before men and a horrible failure before God. **2 Corinthians 5:10** says: “*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.*” Paul knew there was coming a day in which he would have to give account for his life at the tribunal of Christ. Paul did not want to be ashamed on that day. He wanted to hear the Master say, “Well done, good and faithful servant!”

B. MAY I ALWAYS LIFT CHRIST UP.

After stating his ambition in negative terms in verse 20, Paul restates it in positive terms: “*but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, where by life or by death.*” This was the heart of Paul’s ambition: that Christ be honored. The word “honored” means “to make great.” The KJV renders it “magnified.” The NASB translates it “exalted.” How can the creatures magnify the Creator? How can the finite magnify the infinite? How can the sinful magnify the holy? Christ is sovereign, supreme, and self-sufficient. He does not need us to make him great. He is great! But we can honor, exalt, or magnify the greatness of the Lord in the world.

It is like a telescope. A telescope does not make heavenly bodies larger. It brings them into view so those who are far away can see their inherent greatness. This is to be the supreme ambition of every Christian: that Christ will be honored. How? Paul says, “with full courage.” The Greek word has the thought of freedom of speech. Paul acknowledges his fears and the temptation he faced to shrink away from his testimony for Christ. Paul was human. And the pressure he faced was real. Yet he trusted the Lord would give him the sufficient courage needed to honor Christ in any situation. Likewise, the Lord is able to give you the courage you need to honor Christ in your situation.

WHEN? Paul says, “with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body.” Paul remembered this was not the first time he had to honor Christ in uncertain circumstances. And he trusted the God who sustained him in the past would help him to honor Christ in the present situation. WHERE? Paul says, “Christ will be honored in my body.” The greatness of Christ needs a theater in which his honor may be displayed. Our bodies are to be that theater. **1 Corinthians 6:20** says, “*You were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*” A.T. ROBERTSON was right: “It is harder to make Christ great in the body than in the spirit.” But Christ is more honored when we submit and surrender our bodies to him. I love the chorus, “Lord, I want to be a Christian in my heart.” But if my heart is the only place where I am a Christian, I am not a Christian. **Romans 12:1** says, “*I appeal to therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*” Mark it down: God wants your body. Everyday you should place your body on the altar before God in prayer:

- **Lord, here are my hands.**
- **Lord, here are my feet.**

- Lord, here are my eyes.
 - Lord, here are my feet.
 - Lord, here are my lips.
 - Lord, here is my voice.
 - Lord, here are my genitals.
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Verse 20 says: “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 magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.” Devotion to Christ is a life-or-death commitment.

Christians arrived at a house church in the Soviet Union one Sunday in small groups to not arouse the suspicions of KGB informers. They began the meeting quietly singing a hymn. Suddenly two soldiers charged in. One shouted, “If you wish to renounce your commitment to Jesus Christ, leave now!” Two or three people left quickly, then another. A few seconds later, two more left. “This is your last chance. Either turn against your faith in Christ,” he ordered, “or stay and suffer the consequences.” Two more people slipped into the night. The rest stayed, some with children trembling beside them, fully expecting to be imprisoned or gunned down. One of the soldiers locked the door. The other said them crowd, “Put your hands up... in praise to our Lord Jesus Christ. We, too, are Christians. We were sent to a house church a few weeks ago to arrest a group of believers, but instead we were converted! We charged in the way we did, however, because we have learned that if a person is not willing to die for their faith, they can't really be trusted.”

III. THE ADVANTAGE OF TRUE DELIVERANCE

JAMES MONTGOMERY BOICE said it well: “Philippians 1:21 cuts like a surgeon’s scalpel to the heart of Christianity.” In WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE’S Hamlet, the young prince wonders whether to relieve his sorrows by suicide, musing, “To be, or not to be, that is the question.” The matter was simpler for Paul: “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” This is the advantage of true deliverance. Paul declares, “I can’t lose. If I live, I win. If I die, I win.” What do you do with a person like that? How do you stop him? How do you hinder him? How do you discourage him? You can’t let him live. For he says, “To live is Christ.” And you can’t kill him, for he says, “To die is gain.” In **Romans 14:8**, Paul says, “*For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s.*”

Philippians 1:21 is not an exhortation. It is the testimony of a Christ-centered life. Paul says, “For to me.” He does not speak to or for anyone else. He speaks with a sanctified selfishness. To experience true deliverance in your life, you must be able to say for yourself that Christ is all in life and Christ is all in death.

A. CHRIST IS ALL IN LIFE.

Verse 21 says, “*For to me to live is Christ...*” Every person lives for someone or something. Paul defined his life by his relationship with Christ. He does not say...

- Life is from Christ. That is to say Jesus is the source of life.
- Life is for Christ. That is to say Jesus is the purpose of life.
- Life is with Christ. That is to say Jesus is place of life.
- Life is being like Christ. That is to say Jesus is the standard of true life.
- Life is in Christ. That is to say Jesus is the sphere of life.

All of these statements are true. But Paul said, “*To live is Christ.*” Life in its sum is Christ. To experience true deliverance, Christ must be the sum total of your life. Christ must be the **summum bonum** of your life. Christ must be your all and all. Let me ask you something. How would you answer this question? If you were to fill in the blank, “To me to life is _____” what would your answer be? Would it be...

- To live is to be rich.
- To live is to be successful.
- To live is to be powerful.
- To live is to be famous.
- To live is to be happy.

Most of us would not openly say we are living for these worldly things. Yet these are the things many of us have set our hearts on. Your god is not the God you claim to worship on Sunday mornings. Your god is whatever you think about the most. Your God is whatever brings you the greatest joy. Your god is whatever defines your life. The Christ-centered life testifies, “*For to me to live is Christ...*”

B. CHRIST IS ALL IN DEATH.

We tend to focus on what the New Testament teaches about the Christian lifestyle. Unfortunately, we neglect what it teaches about the Christian death-style. Both are essential marks of Christ-centered life. We should honor Christ in live and death. This was Paul’s testimony: “*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*”

Paul did not have a death wish. He had a Christ wish. In **Philippians 3:9-10**, exults: “*that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*” Paul wanted more of Christ. And if death brought more of Christ, he viewed death as gain. “Gain” is an economic term. It is the same term Paul used in **Philippians 3:7-8**: “*But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*” We speak of losing loved-ones when they die. But if that loved-one is in Christ, he or she did not lose anything. Death is gain.

What does the Christian gain in death? **John 14:2-3** says: “*In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.*” **2 Corinthians 5:8** says, “*Yes, we are of good course, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.*” **Revelation 14:13** says, “*And I heard a voice from heaven saying, ‘Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Blessed indeed,’ says the Spirit,*

'for they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!" Hebrews 6:10 says, "For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do." Psalm 16:11 says, "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore." Praise the Lord! To live is Christ! To die is gain!