

Lesson 6

Living with Heaven in View

Philippians 1:18b-26

Have you visited a bookstore lately? If so, I'm sure you've seen the sections crammed with best-selling self-help and "how-to" books—all with step-by-step directions for achieving just about anything you can think of.

But do you see many books titled *How to Die*, or *Your Guide to Dying*? I doubt it. I know I haven't. It's not a popular (or comfortable!) subject. Desperate for an answer, a small child wrote, "Dear God, What is it like when you die? Nobody will tell me. I just want to know. I don't want to do it!" Adults are not so brave to ask. No, we'd rather search for the how-to's of living the good life!

But, my sister in Christ, God's suffering servant Paul gives us *both* answers. In these eight-plus verses, Paul shows us not only how to live, but also

how to die. In both life...and death... Paul is a "saint," one dedicated to the service of the Lord—to Him and to His people. It's very likely that Paul thought about death each and every day as he waited for a verdict that could mean life or death. In these verses we hear Paul's musings and prayers reflecting his outlook on both life *and* death. Let's see what conclusions he came to.

Philippians 1:18b-26

¹⁸ ...yes, and will rejoice.

¹⁹ For I know that this will turn out for my salvation through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

²⁰ according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.

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

²² But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell.

²³ For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be

with Christ, which is far better.

²⁴ Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.

²⁵ And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith,

²⁶ that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.

Out of God's Word...

1. What is Paul's concern in either life or death (verse 20)?

2. Looking at verse 21, how does Paul, the "sold-out" apostle, view life?

And death?

3. If he lives, what will that mean for Paul and the Philippians according to

verse 22?

verse 24?

verse 25?

verse 26?

4. With what does Paul equate death in verse 23?

How does death compare with life (verse 23)?

One Bible teacher gives us this visual aid for contrasting life and death:⁶

<i>Remaining here</i>	<i>Departing to be with Christ</i>
A temporary residence, a mere tent dwelling	A permanent abode
Suffering mixed with joy	Joy unmixed with suffering
Suffering for a little while	Joy forever
Being absent from the Lord	Being at home with the Lord



The fight	The feast
The realm of sin	The realm of complete deliverance from sin



...and into your heart

- Regarding death:
How do you think most people view death?

What new truths have you learned from this passage?

When English Puritan Richard Baxter lay dying at age 76, racked with pain and disease, a friend asked him, “Dear Mr. Baxter, how are you?” His reply? “Almost well!” What a perspective! Mr. Baxter knew—and believed—that death meant simply to depart and be with Jesus, which is far better. Or, as another has said of death and dying, “God is stripping me of everything to give me everything.” No, death is not the end, not the unknown, not the

worst thing that can happen to us. As a line of poetry reads, “Better, far better with Christ to be, living and loved through eternity.”

Oh, how Paul loved the Lord! And, oh, how Paul yearned to be with the Lord he loved! Yet he subordinated his personal desire to his pastoral responsibility. He chose to use his days on earth so others might know Christ.

- Regarding life:
How do you think most people view life?

What new truths have you learned from this passage?

The Bible tells us that Christ is exalted in our body as long as we live (verse 20). It also tells us “for if we live, we live to the Lord” (Romans 14:8). Life for Paul, above all, meant more ministry, more time to teach and serve others, more time for fruitful labor. May that be so for us! Richard Baxter, whom we just observed facing death at age 76, suffered ill health for 56

years prior to his passing and was once imprisoned for 18 months. And yet, like Paul, he viewed every day of life as an opportunity to minister. Like Paul, he preached every day as a dying man to dying men, never sure if he would preach again. And, like Paul, he wrote, becoming one of the most voluminous of English authors, penning more than 100 works.

Heart Response

Won't you join with countless others and make this key verse to Philippians, verse 21, your creed...for life and death? Won't you join with fellow believers—like writers and missionaries Elisabeth Elliot, Carol Talbot, and Corrie ten Boom—who live and lived by these inspired words of Paul: “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain”? These ladies, dear friend, are part of the great cloud of witnesses who show us how to live and how to die. Each gives and gave selflessly from her waning strength, some even tottering while teaching, but nevertheless, teaching, that they might bear more fruit in min-

istry and that others—like you and me—might progress and taste greater joy of faith.

Life is more than planning for retirement, saving money, purchasing a recreational vehicle, traveling, sliding for home, and living it up. Hear the prayer of Jim Elliot, the martyred first husband of Elisabeth Elliot:

God makes His ministers a flame of fire. Am I ignitable? God, deliver me from the dread asbestos of “other things.” Saturate me with the oil of Thy Spirit that I may be a flame. Make me Thy fuel, Flame of God.⁷

—Jim Elliot