

Experiencing the Joy
Philippians 1:12-26
Joy in the Face of Death

Intro: None of us relishes the idea of leaving this life; but we cannot deny the inevitable. “The living know that they shall die”. Imagine that at some future time you are confronted with the real threat of death. What would you do if the doctor should say to you, “Your prognosis is not good. You have a 50-50 chance of surviving this disease? Or, a 50-50 chance of making it through this surgery?”

Would you be able to deal with it? How do you anticipate that you would feel? Could you possibly find joy in such a scenario? Maybe that seems beyond the scope of human ability; yet, the apostle Paul found himself in such a situation and even in the face of death found a way to maintain his joy in God. Wouldn't you like to be able to do the same? But how?

Let's consider the example of Paul in Phil. 1:12-26. (Read it) Let's focus our attention now on the latter half of this paragraph.

Paul in the face of death

The past four years had been traumatic for Paul. He had lived in uncertainty day by day never knowing when soldiers might come in and drag him off to execution or release him to freedom.

For two long years he waited patiently for Felix to give the o.k. for his release only to discover that he had been delaying in hopes of a bribe from the church.

Now in Rome things were still uncertain. Paul was to appear before the infamous Nero to defend himself against charges made against him. History tells us that later Paul was to die under Nero's administration, so Paul was dealing with man fully capable of giving the death sentence to a man like Paul. In addition, Paul mentions that some were preaching the gospel hoping to cause Paul harm in his imprisonment. Perhaps the disturbances in the city might have given the emperor reasons to put a stop to this movement by killing its principle leaders.

Yet, in spite of this uncertainty and fear, Paul here at death's door, maintained his joy in God.

How Paul met an uncertain future with joy

Praying and asking others to pray in faith, v. 19.

Paul believed that his prayers and the prayers of the Philippians would result in his release--v. 19

Trusting in God's providence, v. 19.

It would seem that Paul's reference to “the provision of the Spirit” is to the promise the Lord had made his apostles that they need not be

anxious about what they might say when brought before judges or rulers, but that in that hour the Spirit would give them the words they needed to speak (Mt. 10:19-20). In this way, Paul hoped to boldly magnify Christ even before the emperor Nero.

Through the favorable spread of Christ's teaching in the city and among the household of Caesar it is possible that Paul might be viewed more favorably by the emperor.

Preparing for all possibilities, v. 21

If I live...

If he lived, Christ would be living in Him and fruitful labor would result.--v. 21-22

If I die....

If he was killed, he would be with Christ! v. 23

That would be “gain”. That would be far better than living in this life!

Based on all considerations Paul felt he would be released: v. 25-26

Yet, we see Paul:

Welcoming all options, v. 20.

It is a special life and a special man who can stand at death's door and rejoice whatever the outcome—who can welcome all options. The reason Paul could do this is because he had one single-minded purpose—he lived to magnify the Lord. No matter the outcome God would be glorified and he would be blessed, v. 20.

If only we could learn to see life like Paul!

Application to ourselves

As Christians we will be confronted with uncertain and fearful futures.

We have no exemption from earth's hardship and pains; and we may even have additional fears for the sake of Christ. We do not need to be surprised when we face them.

We need to put our lives in God's hands.

Let's pray for ourselves and let's pray for each other. 1 Pet. 5:16
And like Paul let's trust God to do what's best.

We need to commit ourselves to the purpose of glorifying Christ by our lives.

If we live for lesser earthly goals, our lives will be shattered by the prospect of death. But if our life goal is to glorify God, then every circumstance can work to His glory. Can we say, “For me to live is Christ?”

We need to be prepared for death at all times!

If we are right with God, we need not be overcome by the fear of death; but like Paul, we can face it with confidence that we too will be with the Lord. Do we have unresolved issues with God? Are there things we need to make right? If so, let's take care of them. If not, let's rejoice that we have hope.

Conclusion: The reason why Christians can live with joy is because we have both temporal and eternal purpose! We can glorify God here in this life and then live with God in the life to come! Do you have this hope?