

# AN EARNEST EXPECTATION

## PHILIPPIANS 1:19-30

For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you. And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.

Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God. For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me.

For seventeen years Martin and Gracia Burnham were New Tribes missionaries in the Philippines. Martin was a jungle pilot who delivered mail and supplies to fellow missionaries in

remote locations. Gracia home-schooled her three kids - all of which were born in the Philippines.

On May 27, 2001, while celebrating their anniversary at a resort on the island of Palawan, the Burnhams were captured by a group of militant Islamic terrorists.

For over a year - 377 days - the Burnhams were held hostage. They were always on the move. They were transported from one primitive jungle location to another.

Their ordeal came to an end on June 7, 2002.

Originally, the Burnhams were two of twenty hostages, but over the course of the year everyone was released except them and one other captive. It was becoming apparent to Martin that they might not make it out alive.

On the morning of June 7 - *after discussing this very real possibility* - Martin suggested to his wife, [“The Bible says to serve the Lord with gladness. Let's go out all the way. Let's serve Him all the way with gladness.”](#)

She agreed. So they prayed together, recited some Bible verses from memory, and sang praises to God. Then they laid down in their hammock to get some rest.

Shortly thereafter, the shooting started. The Philippine military stormed the compound, raining gunfire on their abductors. Sadly, Gracia was hit by a bullet in the leg, while another round fatally struck Martin in the chest.

Today, Gracia resides in Rose Hill, Kansas. And according to her website, if you ask about her life today, she'll again quote you Scripture, [“the Lord's mercies are new every morning.](#)

**Great is His faithfulness.”** She continues to choose to serve the Lord with gladness.

It’s interesting that even in the face of death, there was something in the heart of Martin Burnham that caused him to choose joy. He said to his wife, *“Let’s go out all the way. Let’s serve the Lord all the way with gladness.”*

The Holy Spirit stirred his heart. The joy of Jesus became real to Martin even in his most desperate hour.

This is also what the Apostle Paul came to know.

The book of Philippians is about **joy at half-mast.**

As we noted last week, the flag of the British Monarch, her Royal Standard, flies from the top of Buckingham Palace whenever the Queen is in residence. Her royal flag is evidence that Her Highness is in the house.

And likewise, joy is the evidence that Jesus is residing in us - that He’s on the throne of our lives! And it’s true, even in times of sadness - even in threatening and difficult times - when the flag is at half-mast, joy still flies!

This is what Paul experienced during his incarceration and now writes about in his letter to the Philippians.

Paul and his cohort, Timothy, were occupying a prison cell in Rome. And understand what this meant in reality.

We’re not talking three square meals a day, clean laundry, a bunk with a mattress, a library, a recreation yard, even cable television. Think of a subterranean cave. The conditions Paul experienced in Rome were more conducive for a population of rats, than of men.

I've been to Paul's Mamertium Prison, just off the famous forum, in the heart of ancient city of Rome.

Today, it's below street level, much like in ancient times. Originally, it was a cistern, a water reservoir (or pit), that was turned into a prison. Prisoners were lowered through a hole into what was a dungeon. Today, the prison is now a chapel, but it still has a damp, musky feel. My impression was "once a prison always a prison."

Try to picture Paul as he writes this letter to the Philippians. He's still wearing the tattered clothes he wore during his shipwreck at sea. The cave he occupies is cold. It's damp. It's cramped. It's been months since he's bathed. *But his body odor is not what you smell...*

For Paul and Timothy urinate - even defecate - in a wooden bucket kept in the corner of the cell. Paul tries to rest despite being bound with leg irons. Sleep only happens after total exhaustion. It's not a fun place to be.

Nevertheless, *there's joy in this prison.* Paul chooses joy. He "rejoices" or "takes joy." He finds joy in Jesus.

Here's a big truth we learn from Philippians - often difficult circumstances occur we can't control, but we *can* choose our attitude. We can "choose joy!" When all of life goes wrong on the outside, we can look to Jesus, and find the joy He brings bumping up on the inside.

Proverbs 23:7 reads, "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he." This is what Paul reiterates to the Philippians.

In this letter, fifteen times Paul talks about our thought-life - another ten times he mentions our remembrances.

He understands, how we think about a given situation determines our emotions toward it and our reaction to it.

It's been said, "We cannot change our heart, but we can change our mind. Whereas, God can change our heart, but He won't change our mind." That means it's when I decide to think differently about a situation, and look to Jesus for the joy He promises, God begins to work on the inside of my life to manufacture that joy.

I can look at that flat tire on my way home from work as a pain in the posterior... or I can see it as a possible encounter with someone who needs Jesus. Maybe, the roadside worker who comes to my rescue, or perhaps the mechanic who's going to patch the puncture later.

Has it ever dawned on you *the waitress assigned to your table... the clerk who's handling your account... the vet who's working on your pet...* needs the Gospel you proclaim to believe, and have pledged yourself to share?

In fact, Martin and Gracia's catastrophic ordeal eventually led to the conversion of four of her abductors. God used her tragedy for the furtherance of the Gospel.

Paul didn't believe *in accidents*, he believed *in providence*. God is behind the scenes, maneuvering circumstances for the advancement of the Gospel.

As I mentioned last week, we turn a corner when **we look at our inconveniences as God's opportunities.**

This is what happened with Paul's imprisonment.

What any of us in this room would've seen as - *at best an unfortunate situation, and at worst a Divine abandonment* - Paul saw as opportunity for the Gospel.

His time in jail gave him amazing access to the Emperor's Imperial Guard. Roman soldiers were coming to Christ through Paul's witness. The Gospel had come to the heart of the empire - to Nero's own soldiers.

In addition, Paul's incarceration had motivated other Christian pastors to step up their evangelistic efforts.

Some shared their faith with pure intentions, others from selfish motives, but the Gospel was being preached. And none of it would've occurred unless Paul had occupied that prison cell. In that, he took great joy!

Paul continues to write to the Philippians in the wake of his incarceration, verse 19, **"For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ..."** Paul knows if the Philippians pray, the Lord Jesus will bring deliverance.

But the **"deliverance"** he's thinking of isn't necessarily his release from prison. The Greek term is **"soteria"** from which we get the word **"soteriology."** Its definition is the **"the study of the doctrine of eternal salvation."**

The deliverance that interests Paul isn't earthly parole, or even acquittal. He's not thinking of a verdict from Nero. *He* can't render the judgment Paul desires.

Paul is hoping for *a verdict from God*. He wants the Lord to say, **"well done good and faithful servant."** Paul wants to escape his circumstances unblemished by doubt, or worry, or



fear, or grumbling, or any hint of compromise. Like Martin Burnham, Paul and Timothy want to *leave this world serving the Lord with gladness*.

And to do so, according to verse 19 Paul and Timothy were depending on two things: the **prayers of the Philippians** and **the supply of the Holy Spirit**.

Don't ever think Paul treated prayer flippantly. He counted on prayer from his partners in the Gospel.

It seems unfair to a diligent servant like Paul that his plight would be effected by whether friends hundreds of miles away, remembered to pray for him or not - but apparently that was the case. **Prayer is spiritual currency. When it changes hands things happen.**

I hope we don't just say we're praying for each other because it's a Christian politeness, when in reality we have no real intention of praying at all. Prayer is the most vital service you can do for me, and I for you.

And Paul is also trusting in the supply of the Holy Spirit. This is a resource only Jesus Himself can give.

The Holy Spirit is the means by which God works inside us... He's *the refreshing fountain* that springs up. He's *the empowering wind* that blows through. He's *the soothing oil* that flows down. He's *the sparkling wine* we drink in. He's *the consuming fire* that melts and molds, and allows the Potter to fashion our lives.

Understand, the boldness and courage Paul aspires to in these verses has nothing to do with his own resolve. He's trusting the Spirit to make him strong.

So he shouts in verse 20, “**according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed...**”

This past week I listened to bits and pieces of the testimony of former FBI director, James Comey. *Apparently, I wasn't the only one. It had a Super Bowl size viewership.* What interested me most was his admission of being intimidated in the Oval Office in front of the President of the United States.

Comey spoke of being “**stunned**” - acting “**cowardly.**” He wasn't pretending to be “**a Captain Courageous.**”

As the head of the FBI, James Comey was a very influential person in his own right, yet his timidity in that moment reminds us of how difficult it is to speak truth to power. And especially so, when the person you're addressing has the power to determine *your* own fate.

In light of that, imagine Paul before the Emperor.

Nero was a nutcase. He killed his mom for suspicion of treason. Now Paul had to face Nero. *Talk about some real intimidation!* In comparison, what James Comey had to endure was a drip in the bucket.

Yet Paul's “**earnest expectation and hope**” was that he would never be intimidated... or back down from his faith... or be ashamed of His Savior and the Gospel...

Paul calls it “**my earnest expectation and hope**” - his *sincerest desire* and *deepest longing* is that he won't buckle under to the fear of death, or the pain of torture, or the intimidation and threats of people in power.

It reminds me of Jesus' words, “**Do not fear those who kill**



the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” Paul feared the right person - and that wasn't Nero. He was far more worried about offending God.

This is why he says, “**But with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.**” This was *the daring* Paul **usually** demonstrated... Hey, this was the man who was stoned in Lystra, beaten in Philippi, run out of town in Thessalonica, arrested in Jerusalem, and even appealed his case to Rome while on trial in Caesarea.

Boldness was his habit - his *modus operandi*.

Paul just wants to make sure that when the chips are down, and the pressure is on, he doesn't succumb to some *outbreak of fear* or *sudden wave of trepidation*.

Paul wanted to make certain he does what he's always done, and that's **stand up for Jesus!** I trust that's our “*earnest expectation and hope*” as well.

The point is this, **far more important to Paul than *his deliverance from jail was his witness for Christ.***

He wanted to shine brightly for Jesus until the last ray of light was extinguished from his candle. Whether he lives or dies his passion is to display Jesus!

Notice, Paul wants Jesus to be “*magnified*” in His body. Realize, there are some things we would never know existed if they weren't magnified. We don't make them any bigger, we just make them *appear* bigger.

The bacteria that can kill a person, can't be seen with the naked eye. It's invisible to us without ample amounts of magnification. We need a microscope.

Enormous stars, like *the Pistol Star*, are 100 times larger than our Sun. This star give off as much energy in 20 seconds than our Sun generates in a year. Yet this giant of the universe could never be seen with the naked eye. It was discovered by the Hubble telescope.

And this is what Paul is saying, Jesus is no longer seen with physical eyes. But he gets magnified in the lives of His followers - *especially when their faith is tested and they're called on to suffer for His sake.*

Paul desires that Christ will be magnified in Him by life or death. What matters to Paul is not living or dying, but putting Christ on display for all the world to see.

His desire is for Jesus to be magnified in Him.

He says, **“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”** Paul could take joy in any situation - in life or in death - **for all that mattered to him was Jesus.**

Paul's supreme desire was not *to live* or *to die* - or anything in between. The burning issue in Paul's life was not *his goals, his comfort, his status, his future.*

Paul's utmost desire was for Jesus to be magnified.

If that meant living, fine. If it meant dying, so be it. His chief concern was for Jesus to be glorified in him.

I'll never forget visiting the ruins of ancient Philippi in modern day Greece. We were privileged to stand on the

mosaic floor of one of the very first church buildings ever erected. The octagonal floor dated to 340 AD.

Prior to that time churches met in homes. But when the Roman Emperor Constantine embraced Christianity, believers across the empire started meeting openly and publicly. And apparently, those in Philippi were particularly bold in their witness for Jesus.

Surely, there were still some lingering hostilities between the Christians, and the Romans hanging on to paganism. Persecution remained a real threat. **But the Philippians were first to come out into the open!**

They drew a target on their backs. It was as if they were saying, *“Come and get us if you want, but we stand for Jesus.”* I believe they recalled Paul words in the letter addressed to their forefathers. They adopted Paul’s motto, *“to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”*

**Paul understood that a person isn’t ready to live until they’re first ready to die...** When an author writes a novel he knows from the beginning how he wants the book to end. It’s impossible to develop the plot without knowing where you want the road to lead.

Paul approached life this way. He settled the ending first. He dealt with the final chapter from the outset; thus he was free to tackle the rest of His life head-on - always pressing forward - never looking back.

Paul reminds me of James Calvert, missionary to the Fiji Islands. On Calvert’s first trip his ship captain was nervous about the venture. The captain realized the dangers facing

him. Door-to-door witnessing among man-eating cannibals is not the safest thing to do.

*When they invite you for dinner - it's not a good sign.*

He told Calvert, "You can't just walk in among these savages - you'll lose your life." James Calvert replied, "We died before we came." Paul had a similar attitude.

*If Paul lived... great... It was life with His Savior.*

*If he died... greater still... It was life with His Savior minus the rocks, and rods, and mobs, and persecution.*

I like verse 21 in TLB, "Living means opportunities for Christ, and dying - well, that's better yet!"

Often someone will ask, "How you doing today?" And we'll reply, "Well, I'm alive, but it sure beats the alternative." Well, no it doesn't - not according to Paul.

Paul believed that for the Christian death is always preferable to life. It's always "better yet." Remember, Paul had been to the third heaven. He spoke of it in 2 Corinthians 12, and said he heard things there that he couldn't even speak about - that were too marvelous.

Hey, death for the Christian is always "better yet." I believe that, whether the person was six months old, or six years old, or 16 years old, or 96 years old. We don't ever mourn for the person who dies in Christ. We mourn for ourselves. *He or she is in a better place.*

Paul knew that Christ had assured for him a positive outcome regardless of the verdict rendered by Nero. Whether he lived or died *his future was about Jesus. I hope you have a cause that transcends life and death.*

To Paul, Jesus was not at the top of a long list of other priorities - He was **THE list**. Nor was He one slice of the pie of life. Jesus was **THE whole pie!**

Every other concern in life was secondary to bringing glory to Jesus. Paul had eliminated all other rivals. There was no other attraction competing for his affection. His whole heart belonged to Jesus Christ.

AW Tozer once wrote, "It's not that people don't want God, it's that people have things they want more than God! We are determined to have what we want most."

Jesus died for you. He loves you with a boundless love, and He has a heaven-full of joy, and blessing, and excitement in store for you. What better way for you and I to spend the one and only life we've been given, than to magnify Jesus and bring Him glory?

Yes, Paul had family, friends, church, and work - but everything else in his life gained its significance as it related to Jesus. Here's a Southern expression you'll know... "**Paul placed all his eggs in one basket.**"

Jesus is all that matters in the long run - and He's what makes everything else matter in the short run.

Nikolaus von Zinzendorf, the father of German missions, once made the following statement about Jesus, "**I have but one enthusiasm; it is He, only He.**"

When our goal is to bring glory to ourselves, we become vulnerable to a whole host of problems...

*It doesn't take much to trip up our plans...*

*We end up trapped by worry and fear...*

*We're victimized by situations beyond our control...*

But if I adopt Paul's motto - *to live is Christ, to die is gain* - I'm not worried about me - my image, or comfort, or convenience, or status, or success. No matter what happens - if Christ is glorified - I win in the end.

If I live in a hut or a mansion... If I'm a CEO or a grocery bagger... If my team wins by five touchdowns or loses by five touchdowns... as long as my life points people to Jesus I'm the victor. It doesn't matter if anyone notices me - *God in heaven pays attention!*

Paul was caught up in someone far greater than Himself. He would go anywhere - and do anything - and make any sacrifice needed to glorify Jesus.

*Paul gave up his whole life for Jesus - but ironically, no one ever lived a fuller and richer life than Paul!*

As Jesus said (Matthew 10:39), *"He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it."* If your life has grown boring and dull - if it's lost its thrill and adventure - if your thoughts are choked with worry and fear about stuff that won't matter 100 years from now, *don't you think it's time for a change?*

I have a favorite scene from the movie, *"The Wind And The Lion."* Sean Connery plays the Raisuli. He's a leader of the Berber bandits that fight against Western Imperialism in the Moroccan deserts. At the end of the movie his army gets trounced by a Western coalition.

In the final scene he and his right-hand man are on



horseback, riding on the beach. His sidekick mourns, "Raisuli we've lost everything. We've lost everything."

With a roguish laugh the Raisuli rides off into the sunset, and shouts as he leaves.... You listen (clip)...

Did you hear what he said, "Ahh, isn't there anything in your life worth losing everything for?" What if I asked you that question. *Do you have a big, eternal purpose?*

Do you have a big deal in your life that dwarfs all the trivial concerns that dominate most people? I mean, a really big enchilada.... If you're a Christian you should.

Paul understood there is a cause that transcends even life and death. *"To live is Christ, to die is gain."*

Let me ask you to fill in the blank, "To live is \_\_\_\_\_."  
How would you answer? *Work - success - friends - kids - sports - sex - hobbies - popularity - security...*

**Work** that lacks fulfillment?

**Success** that's temporary?

**Friends** that come and go?

**Kids** that'll grow up and leave home?

**Sports** you can't play forever?

**Sex** that leaves you empty and ashamed?

**Hobbies** that grow boring?

**Popularity** that's fickle?

**Security** that's an illusion?

Are these things really worth your one and only life?

Listen to Paul's words in Philippians 1:21, one more time - **to live is Christ, to die is gain!** Make that your motto and like Paul your life will be a grand adventure.

In verse 22, Paul let's us in on his own personal deliberations. He was weighing out his options, **"But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor..."**

There are temporal blessings that come with serving God. Heaven is *"better yet,"* but there are rewards in the here and now. There're reasons to hang around.

*Yet Paul is torn.* He says, **"Yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better."** Notice again, Paul has no fear of death.

And this should be true of all Christians. Death is no longer our enemy. What was once a **lily pad** (a place to croak), is now a **launching pad** into glories galore.

Hey, we might *fear dying* - especially doing so in a painful way - but that's different than *fearing death*.

I might care about *the how* - but when we're face to face with death we'll have nothing to fear. I'm simply falling into the arms of Jesus. Remember 1 Corinthians 15 (55-57), **"O death where is your sting?... But thanks be to God who gives us the victory in our Lord Jesus."**

Paul continues, **"Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you."** It was **go to heaven** or **be a help**. For Paul death will be heavenly, but to live on in this life is more opportunity for him to magnify Jesus.

In heaven we'll *be at rest*, but in this world we're *in the mix*. Right now is the only opportunity we'll ever have to make a difference in the lives of folks we love.

We are building a legacy of faith - making a case for Christ - but there comes a time for all of us when the building will cease - *when our case is closed*.

“And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.”

Paul has been deliberating his desires, but now he draws his conclusion. He's confident he'll be released.

His time isn't over. His work on Earth isn't done. And Paul's interactions with the Philippians will continue.

And this has huge ramifications for the church in Philippi. **They are the reason Paul postpones heaven!**

Imagine, Paul could have **paradise**, instead he chooses **Philippi**. Paul delays *his crown* - he endures *his cross* - so he can spend time with *his church*.

Wow, what this must've meant to *Lydia - the slave girl - the jailer and his family* - the two squabbling women: *Euodia and Syntyche - Epaphroditus* - and *Clement*... and a host of other members of this church. It meant Paul loved them and valued them immensely.

But it also meant they had a responsibility not to waste Paul's commitment, but be a worthy investment of a Gospel effort. This is why Paul tells them, **“Only let your conduct be**

worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel..."

Paul is like a father encouraging his children to make him proud. He wants them, *and us*, to **stand fast**, to **stand together**, and to **stand up** for the Gospel.

The word Paul uses that gets translated "*striving*" speaks of an effort that drips with blood, sweat, and tears. It's an effort that goes beyond exhaustion. Paul is saying, **leave it all out on the field for the Gospel.**

High School football is a dreadful sport. You practice five days a week for 16 weeks, just to play ten games.

You dress in heavy equipment, go through rigorous exercises, endure the heat of summer, take a beating every day, and risk getting injured - while all your buddies are hanging out by the pool - *and for what?*

You get zero pay, and very little recognition.

*But here's why I did it?* On the Friday nights when it all comes together and the team succeeds - when the gun sounds and the scoreboard reads that you're on the winning end - there's a joy that swells up inside.

There's hugs and high-fives all around. It's a grand celebration... *And a sense of accomplishment...* You were a part of something bigger than yourself - and all that practice and striving and agonizing was worth it.

And this is the same joy you experience when you're

committed to Gospel-oriented people - to a church that lives, and breathes, and labors for the Gospel's sake.

You come week after week. You labor with little or no recognition. You put up with the heat of conflict and risk getting hurt. *And why?* Because when it all clicks, and everybody comes together you get this heavenly sense that God has been glorified. It causes an incredible joy!

You've been a part of something bigger than yourself. Your life feels richer. You've gained a sense of significance. *And you come roaring back for more...*

Joy comes when we *stand fast, stand together, and stand up* for Jesus. And this is how we push back against our enemies. Verse 28, *“and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God.”*

When Christians refuse to cower and be intimidated. When we *take a stand and stand together*, we incriminate the world and those who stand against us.

*Finding our purpose is proof of their lostness.*

Our faith in the Gospel confirms our salvation, and exposes this world's doubts, and lies, and unbelief.

Chapter 1 concludes, *“For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me.”* I'm not sure the Philippians were mature enough to see persecution as an honor bestowed, but this was Paul's perspective.

The word *“granted”* literally means *“graced.”* Paul is saying

we're *graced* or *avored* by God with suffering.

In Paul's mind, and in the early church, it was always an honor to suffer for Jesus' sake. Recall in Acts 5:31, after the apostles were tried for preaching the Gospel, and reluctantly released - we're told, "So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name."

*Even persecution was a reason to take joy!*

The Christian wears two badges of honor! First, is **our salvation**. Second, is **our suffering**. It's an honor to both *believe in Jesus*, and be *bruised for Jesus*.

Yet this is so foreign to our ears. Here's the message we hear from pulpits today, "*Prosperity is the birthright of a believer, not persecution - salvation not suffering. Faith is suppose to make our lives easier, not harder.*"

But this isn't what Paul tells us. Jesus died for us, it is certainly an honor to endure a hardship in His name.

John Calvin once wrote, "Oh, if this conviction were fixed in our minds, that persecutions are to be reckoned among God's benefits, what progress would be made in the doctrine of godliness!" The fact that we resist this truth is what perpetuates our immaturity.

It's true, joy is the flag that flies from the heart where Jesus resides. But at times that flag flies at half-mast.

Joy comes when the outcome is not about *life or death - blessing or suffering* - but when a life is solely fixed on Jesus... when **to live is Christ, to die is gain**.