

The Ultimate Win-Win Scenario

Text: Philippians 1:19-26

By Pastor Trent Boedicker

Do you ever feel like you are caught in between two possibilities and it's as if you are being pulled in different directions?

I think of the times that I have gone to the freezer, after supper, looking for desert. There in front of me are two containers of ice cream: cookies and cream or mint chocolate chip. That's a tough call. They are both excellent selections, and if you were trying to make a case for which is better, you could make a strong case for either one. On the one hand, there is something refreshing about the mintyness of the mint chocolate chip. And who doesn't like chocolate? But, I have to say, I really enjoy the little bits of oreo mixed in with cookies and cream. I could stand there, in the kitchen, with an ice cream scoop in my hand, looking at both containers, and I'm not sure I could say with absolute certainty which I prefer. I guess you could call that a win-win scenario. Either way, it really doesn't matter, I will be satisfied with the outcome. So, I scoop mint chocolate chip in one bowl and cookies and cream in the other and hold them both out to Charity and tell her she can have either one. How does she respond? "It's okay Trent, you pick and I'll take the other." No! I'm caught in the middle of these two possibilities and I just don't know which to choose.

I know, you're thinking the simple solution is to take one scoop of each, and that works when we're talking about ice cream, but that's not always a possibility when you find yourself being pulled in different direction.

The apostle Paul found himself in that type of scenario as he wrote his letter to the Philippians. At the time, he was imprisoned in Rome, waiting for his day in court, when he would make a defense of the gospel before the emperor. He had already spent several years in chains, while his case drug on and on, slowly making its ways through the bureaucracy of the Roman justice system. But now he sensed that a resolution would soon be reached, although he wasn't sure what decision the court would make. Looking towards the future there were two potential outcomes, and from where he was standing he would be happy either way.

It was possible that the verdict would be in his favor, and he might soon be released from his chains to continue his ministry with new found freedom. Of course that would be a good thing. So many churches were praying for this to happen, and he was eager to be reunited with them and see his friends in person again.

But it was also possible that a guilty verdict would be reached, even though Paul had done nothing wrong. This would mean a death sentence for the apostle, and if that were the case his days on this earth could be coming to close. But Paul was not afraid to die; he was more than ready to lay down his life for the sake of Christ.

As he considered these two possibilities, it wasn't easy to decide which he preferred. In some ways he was pulled in both directions. There was a longing within his heart to be with Christ, to

be set free from the afflictions and heartache of this world, to enter the presence of his Savior in glory. But at the same time, he felt the desire to remain on this earth a while longer because there was still work to be done among the churches. You might say that it was a win-win situation. Other people would have looked at things very differently. “Paul, don’t you realize your life is hanging in the balance? Aren’t you worried what the outcome will be?” / “No,” he would have told them. “I win either way. To live is Christ, and to die is gain. His only concern, whether in life or in death, was that Christ be exalted.

This causes us to think about how we view life and death and the time that we have been given on this earth. Is this our greatest desire, for Christ to be exalted in us, whatever the future might hold? None of us know how long we will be here. I could live to be a 100 years old, or I could die tomorrow and my life could be over in the blink of an eye. But if I know Christ as my Savior, it really is a win-win scenario. Of course we want to remain. Every day that we are given is a gift from God and we are to use it for his glory, making an impact on those around us with his love. But at the same time we realize that this is not our true home, and we feel a longing in our hearts for the joy that awaits us in heaven.

There is this tension that we experience as followers of Christ: cherishing the life he has given us, but also looking ahead with eagerness to the life to come.

We need to hold both of those desires in the right balance. It is possible that we become so fixated on what the future holds that we lose sight of the mission God has given us to carry out in the present world. We become so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good and grow impatient for the Lord to call us home. Or perhaps more often we allow ourselves to become so attached to this world, thinking only about there and now, that we forget this is not our true home.

We need to follow the apostle’s example. The more he thought about heaven, the more he determined he was to use every moment of every day to honor his Savior.

As far as future is concerned the believer has a win-win scenario. For us, to live is Christ.

In verses 21-22 Paul considers the possibility of being released from prison he says, *“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If 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!”* (NIV84)

As he considers the possibility of what might happen, he makes a list in his mind of the good that could come from each of scenario, and weighs them both.

It would be wonderful to go on with his life a free man. He had been in chains for so long he almost forgot what that was like. It was exciting to think about continuing his missionary work. There were still places on the map where he had never been, where the gospel had not yet been preached, and he felt compelled to go. He looked forward to planting new churches, and winning new converts to the Lord, spreading the love of Jesus far and wide. And there was still

plenty of work to be done among the churches he already planted: training new leaders, making disciples, helping people grow in their relationship with the Lord. No, he was not ready to hang it up just yet, not when the Lord could still use him to accomplish good in this world.

And he thought about his friends in Philippi who weren't ready to let him go. In verse 24 he says, "...but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body...." (NIV84). He pictured their faces, people he loved, and he knew if he were taken from them now it would break their heart. But if he were able to go and visit their church again it would mean the world to them. He wanted to see them mature in their faith, becoming the next generation of teachers and pastors and missionaries and evangelists. One day the Lord would call him home, but he was not in a hurry to go, he wanted to be there for spiritual children helping them grow and develop in their faith until the very end.

Many of us have experienced that in our own lives with parents or grandparents or close friends watching them battle through illness, holding on, fighting to the very end. Even though there is the desire to depart and be with the Christ there is also the desire to remain for as long as possible to be there for loved ones. And Paul knew what that was like, longing to be with Christ, but at the same time wanting to help them grow and develop in their faith, being there for them as long as possible until the Lord called him home.

He wasn't sure how things would turn out, but he sensed that God still had work for him to do, and he wanted to remain to see it through.

Maybe you have worked with people in the office or in the factory who like to punch out early. They keep checking the clock, as it gets closer and closer to quitting time and even though there is still another twenty minutes to go they say, "Well, I'm calling it a day. There's no sense in taking any more calls, I'll just turn off my phone, shut down the computer gather my things, and get ready to head home." Meanwhile, you're still hard at work wondering "what's he doing? It's not time to quit." There's always someone in the office who tries to leave early. First its ten minutes. The next day its twenty minutes. They keep inching closer to the door waiting for the clock.

But Paul wasn't interested in punching out early. He was going to pursue Christ and use each day for God's glory to the very end.

Paul makes a statement that defined his attitude toward life and this should reflect our attitude as well. He says, "*For me, to live is Christ...*" He means that more than anything else Christ brought him joy and meaning. The Lord was always in his thoughts, and Paul couldn't imagine what life would be like without him. In a very real sense he could say that he was not alive until he met the Lord, and on that day the Lord awakened his soul for the very first time. Christ was his life, his purpose, his greatest desire.

Some people live for themselves but we are to live for the Lord. Without Jesus, the blessings of this life are empty, but with Christ there is true joy and satisfaction.

It reminds us of the words of the psalmist, in Psalm 63:1-5.

¹ O God, you are my God; I earnestly search for you. My soul thirsts for you; my whole body longs for you in this parched and weary land where there is no water. ² I have seen you in your sanctuary and gazed upon your power and glory. ³ Your unfailing love is better than life itself; how I praise you! ⁴ I will praise you as long as I live, lifting up my hands to you in prayer. ⁵ You satisfy me more than the richest feast. I will praise you with songs of joy. Psalm 63:1–5 (NLT)

What would that look like for Christ to be the greatest satisfaction of our lives? What would it look like if he were at the center of everything?

Christian author, John Piper says,

...the inner essence of worship is cherishing Christ as gain—indeed as more gain than all that life can offer—family, career, retirement, fame, food, friends. Or to use words that we love to use around here: it is savoring Christ, treasuring Christ, being satisfied with Christ. [I like to say] “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him,” this is the place [where it comes from]. Christ is magnified in [my life], when...he is prized above life... “To live is Christ” means to count everything as loss now in this life in comparison to the value of gaining Christ. [He is] our soul-food, our heart-delight, our spirit’s pleasure. ⁱ

Be careful not to take each day for granted, because we don’t know how many we have left. You might think, “I have plenty of time to get serious about spiritual things,” but that’s not necessarily the case. The years zip by so fast, and before we know it, it passes us by. Our time on this earth has been entrusted to us by God, it’s not really ours to do with as we please; we are only stewards who are called to be faithful. What is the focus of your life? Can you say, to live is Christ?

As the believer is concerned, to die is gain.

Look at verses 23.

²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; (NIV84)

Paul knew a verdict could be reached any day. Even though he had done nothing wrong there were no guarantees that the court would rule in his favor. On a whim, the emperor could give the order, and have him led away to be thrown to the lions or beheaded by the soldier’s blade. At any moment, his life could be over, just like that.

If that was case, it was okay. In fact, Paul was more than okay with that possibility. It would mean crossing the finish line, reaching his goal, and winning the victory.

. He knew what the future held for him, and so he was ready. His confidence didn’t come from his own accomplishments, but from what the Lord accomplished for him. Christ died on

the cross for our sins, and rose from the dead to offer life everlasting. If we know him as our Savior, we can know where we are going.

For the child of God, leaving this world means entering the presence of our Savior. The Bible tells us that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8). The moment the believer departs from this world in death the Lord will receive us into our home in glory.

Paul could describe death as gain because there was a longing in his heart to see the Lord. It is true, we already experience the presence of Christ in our lives today. He walks beside us through our trials and he holds us close through all our struggles. We can hear his voice as we read Scripture and we talk to him our prayers knowing that he hears us. He is with us, always. But one day we will experience his presence in a more intimate way when we stand before him in heaven. We will see him face to face in all of his splendor and majesty. Faith will finally become sight. We will hear the sound of his voice, and will walk with him, the same way Adam and Eve walked with God in the garden. We will enjoy perfect fellowship with our Savior.

Even though we appreciate the beauty of this world, we know that the glory of heaven will outshine everything we know. There are passages of Scripture that describe what it will be like, but it is difficult for our finite minds to comprehend. 1 Corinthians 2:9 (NIV84) tells us, “...*No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.*” In every way it will exceed our wildest imagination. This present universe is marred by sin, and we see that every day. But when that day comes, we will leave behind all of the heartache, and the sorrow, and the suffering of this present world.

Revelation 21:4–5 (NIV84) describes the eternal state and tells us,

⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” ⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

The person who has this hope can face anything, knowing that beyond our present circumstances and beyond the struggles that we endure... glory awaits.

Picture a runner in a marathon running with all his might. Why does he do it? What moves him to give everything he has, even though his body is weary and his muscles ache? He is thinking of the finish line. He doesn't run simply for the pleasure of running. Yes, there are joys experienced along the way, feeling the breeze on his face, and taking in the sights along the path. But the motive that spurs him on is his desire to reach the goal. He imagines what it will be like to hear the cheer of the crowd. He pictures the trophy that awaits. He thinks of the satisfaction that there will be making it all the way to the end. His eyes are looking ahead to the finish line.

And this is what spurs the Christian on throughout our lives. There are many times when our path becomes difficult. There are struggles that we endure for a little while. There are heartaches and sorrows that weigh us down, but we keep running. We fix our eyes on the finish

line, and think of the joy we will experience when the Savior calls us home and we stand in his presence face to face.

To long for heaven does not mean we are trying to escape this life, it means that we understand the glory that awaits. God's people should live with a yearning in our heart for heaven. It will completely change our perspective. For the child of God, death is not a tragedy but a triumph. Through Christ, his death, burial and resurrection, we will one day experience the ultimate victory.

So don't get too attached. We know that this world is not our final home. I remember as a young person hearing sermons about the return of Christ and thinking to myself, "I hope it doesn't happen today, there is still so much I haven't experienced yet." I look back and realize that wasn't a very good attitude. Yes, there are wonderful blessings to be experienced in this life, and praise God for them, but even joys of this world cannot compare with the future that awaits us. We don't want to let ourselves become so attached to this world that we lose the sense of longing for God's presence in heaven.

Living with Eternal Purpose

As Paul writes this letter he weighs these options not knowing that whatever the future might bring, it was a win-win scenario. If he had reached the end of his life, he was ready, longing to enter the presence of his Savior. But if he was going to live on, this would mean more opportunities to impact the world around him for Christ. What did he have to fear?

In verses 25-26 he says,

²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me. Philippians 1:25-26 (NIV84)

At the end of the day, it wasn't really up to him. His days were in God's hands, but he would gladly embrace God's will for him. And he a strong suspicion that his time was not up just yet.

Steven Runge writes

, "...it really didn't matter to Paul whether he lived or died; either way Christ would be exalted in him. Talk about a change in perspective! If seeing Christ exalted really was the most important thing in our lives, how would that change our priorities and perspective? What would it do to our outlook for the future? ...Living means continued work for Christ, and dying means going to be with Him. The simplicity with which Paul treats life-and-death issues casts things in a whole new light."ⁱⁱ

What about you? How do you view the purpose for your life? What are your thoughts about death? Maybe you try to push aside those kinds of thoughts and live only for today. But if you are a follower Christ, you are called to live with a purpose. We don't have to be afraid of what the future might hold. There is a longing deep in our hearts for the glory that awaits us. But in

the meantime, we are to use each day to honor our Savior. Whether in life or in death, our desire should be Christ to be exalted.

ⁱ Piper, J. (2007). *Sermons from John Piper (1990–1999)*. Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God.

ⁱⁱ Runge, S. E. (2011). *High Definition Commentary: Philippians (Php 1:21–26)*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.