

Ready For Heaven but Needed on Earth

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction:

A. Phil. 1:21-26

B. Paul's circumstances

1. Prisons in Rome were unlike prisons today; they served merely as a holding place for those condemned to die. Occasionally the accused might be detained to await trial, but usually those awaiting trial were encouraged to go into voluntary exile. They were called "publica vincula." Ancus Marcius and Servius Tullius, the fourth and sixth kings of Rome in 600 BC, constructed a dark, damp subterranean structure. One enters the prison by following steps down from the Capitoline. Descending the stairs brings the visitor at the entrance to the prison. It is a small room with a hole in the floor that is the entrance to the dungeon. The dungeon is twelve feet deep in the ground. Its appearance is disgusting and vile because of the filth, darkness, and stench. It was in this room, 6 1/2 ft. high, thirty feet long and twenty-two feet wide, that prisoners who had been condemned to die either by strangulation or starvation were thrown. The phrase "to be cast into prison" had its origins here. At times it would contain so many men that they would have to stand and lie down in shifts. There was an iron door which opened to the Cloaca Maxima, then the main sewer of Rome which emptied into the Tiber. It is said that the dead were cast into the river through this door..

1. He was in a Roman prison for two years - Phil. 1:7

a. Unable to travel and preach

b. Subjected to less than humane conditions

2. He was in sorrow over brethren who were doing harm - Phil. 1:15

a. Sleepless nights in prayer, fear for the cause of Christ

b. His work could have been undone - Phil. 1:12

I. PAUL'S DILEMMA

A. He is in a strait - sunecho: "to hold together, to compress with a crowd or siege, or arrest a prisoner; to compel, perplex, afflict, preoccupy, constrain, hold, keep in, press, lie sick of, stop, be in a strait, straiten, be taken with, throng" (Strong's)

1. Used of a besieged city. The people within are trapped and destitute

2. Used of a strait between two points that forces a ship into a narrow channel. The current moves faster and the waves are more violent. There is danger of being driven against the shore

3. Used of a cattle chute that forces the animal to be stationary while the farmer burns horns, castrates the animal, etc.

4. Used of a prisoner confined within the walls of his cell.

B. Paul's body was here, but his heart was in heaven. In some fashion, Paul experienced all four:

1. There comes a point in the life of every faithful Christian where this world holds no more interest or charm.

2. We become weary with physical needs, struggle with burdens, and the sin that surrounds us.

3. We begin to think longingly of heaven. It is not suicide ideation.

II. PAUL'S DESIRE

- A. Paul longed for liberty, from the Roman prison and the prison of his flesh in this world - 2Cor. 5:1-7
- B. He wanted to "depart" - analuo. It was used in five ways:
 - 1. It was a military term used of soldiers taking down their tents. When we leave the world in death, all we do is fold up a tent of flesh and go home
 - 2. It was a sailor's term meaning to loosen a ship and set sail. At our passing, we just loosen from the moorings of this world and sail away to Paradise.
 - 3. It was a farmer's term used to refer to taking the yoke off of oxen at the end of the work day. One day our work will be finished and the yoke of service will be removed from our necks and we will enter His rest.
 - 4. It was a traveler's term used to speak of putting the horses into the barn at the end of a long journey.
 - 5. It was a political term used to speak of setting prisoners at liberty. The day will come when God will open our prison doors and we will be free.
- B. Paul longed for the Lord, to be with Christ - Rev. 5:6-14
 - 1. He would know this - 2Cor. 12:2-4
 - 1. He said that it is far better - 1Thes. 4:16-17; Rev. 21:4; 1Cor. 2:9

III. PAUL'S DEBT

- A. Paul understood that he had a debt of service to perform for the Lord. He wanted to go to Heaven, but he knew he was needed right here.
 - 1. His obligation through the Lord to the saints as a conduit of His message is not complete - Phil. 1:24-26.
- B. There is a valuable lesson here for every child of God. While our hearts are being tugged homeward, there is a great work to do here
 - 1. If the need was great then, how much greater is it today? - John 4:35
- C. Truths we must come to terms with:
 - 1. God saved us to work - Eph. 2:10; James 2:17-18
 - 2. Every Christian has a job - Eph. 4:16
 - 3. Every Christian is in debt - 2Cor. 5:14
 - 4. Every Christian will be rewarded in proportion to his labors - 2Cor. 5:10
 - 5. Every Christian lives in a world that is still lost - 2Kings 7:9

Conclusion:

- A. Paul felt the weight of this debt.
 - 1. He possessed the greatest outlook on life in this world. It is summed up in verse 21, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."
 - 2. He knew that while he lived, others would see Jesus living in him.
 - 3. He knew that if he were to die, then he would be the better for it.
- B. Would to God that all of us would have a faith like his.