

### #3 Philippians 1;23-29

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**Verse 23:** 'For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. <sup>24</sup> Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.'

First, this shows, without question, that God's Word teaches us, we never enter some kind of unconsciousness at the moment of physical death, that our souls and spirits never die but are instantly in the presence of the Lord after our last breath, after our last heartbeat, that we have absolutely nothing to fear in physical death.

I remember, last year, as Mom was leaving her physical body; as I lay on the bed next to her, I watched her breathing and felt her heartbeat. Eventually she stopped breathing and then, some minutes later, her heart slowed and then stopped. Debbie was there with us and we knew the moment she opened her spiritual eyes and looked into the face of Jesus. She had no fear because there is nothing to fear for the child of God.

I'm sure that Mom was right there, with Jesus, to welcome Rosemary Heydel, just days ago. The two of them were joined, I'm sure with Margie Pio and a few others and they've got this girls group going on. Imagine them: walking, talking and laughing as they met so many others plus, of course, so many heroes from the pages of Scripture and History. But in God's economy, in the eyes of the Lord Jesus Christ, having Mom there, with Him, is just as important to Him as having Paul, David or Peter; He is no respecter of persons; we are all eternally and unimaginably valuable to Him... every one of us. In fact, as we know, each of us are so important to Him, He loves each one of us so much that He was willing to leave His throne and to allow Himself to be tortured and crucified for us.

If He gave Paul the choice as to whether he would stay on in his earthly body or go up into Heaven and into the presence of the Lord, it's evident that Paul chose, for the good of the early Church and for all of us since, to remain on the Earth for some years longer which was, certainly responsible for his having been awarded even more eternal rewards from his Lord.

**Verse 25:** '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.'

Some mistakenly think that Paul's choice was between staying on Earth or *entering into eternal rest* with Jesus Christ in Heaven. That's a misunderstanding of Scripture and of our relationship and position in the Lord Jesus Christ. When Paul died, he didn't, then, enter into his eternal rest. He entered his eternal rest, here on Earth, the moment he understood and decided to do so. Do you remember what we learned in Hebrews?

Remember what Jesus said on the Cross; He said, 'It is finished; it is fulfilled.' He had fulfilled every prophecy, every feast and every miracle that was to have been fulfilled to prove His 'Messiahship.' He kept and fulfilled every Mosaic Law, including, keeping the weekly Sabbath Rest; **He fulfilled all of that for us.** He is our Sabbath Rest. In Him, we have entered our eternal rest. We don't wait until we die to enter that rest; it is ours now and forever. The Hebrew word *sabat* means 'to rest or stop, to cease from work.' It originated with God at Creation; 'On the seventh day, God rested.' This doesn't mean that God was tired and needed to rest, it meant that His work was done and He stopped working; there was no more creating to create. He ceased from His labor. How does that apply to us and to the Lord Jesus Christ as our Sabbath Rest?

When God gave the fourth Commandment, the Israelites were to remember it always and to cease from all labor on that seventh day. Not only was it meant as a time of refreshment but also, even more importantly, it was, just like so much of the Old Testament, a foreshadowing of the coming Messiah. With The Law, they were constantly working to make themselves acceptable to God, so many do's and don'ts and try as they might, they never could achieve righteousness through the Law so there was always, also, the shed blood from countless sacrifices which also foreshadowed Jesus Christ. But even then, with every kept law and sacrifice, they only afforded temporary partial righteousness because the next day, they were back to sin and guilt which was, in itself, a picture of the one day of rest and then right back to their labor.

'For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. <sup>2</sup> For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more

consciousness of sins.<sup>3</sup> But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year.<sup>4</sup> For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.' Heb 10:1 (Nor could the keeping of any Commandments!)

God had commanded that the Sabbath Day be holy and set apart. That was the picture of the Holy and Sinless Sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ but also of our complete holiness, now, in Him. 'But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering **He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.**' Heb 10:11

'There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.' Heb 4:9

'Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness' Rom 4:4

Paul enjoyed his eternal rest in Jesus Christ even while he was in prison. His circumstances did not dictate rest or joy or peace; those were all his, at all times, in Jesus Christ, just as they can be ours also, at all times, no matter what our circumstances happen to be at any given moment... even while our nation falls apart.

Our peace, our joy, our rest are not founded in a politician, a political party, even in our Church family. They are only found in our relationship with our Savior.

**Verse 27:** '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,'

The only way we can truly enter into our Sabbath Rest, our rest in the Lord Jesus Christ, is as we enter in and through Him; He is the way, the only way, and... He said the way was narrow, and hemmed in by discipline as well as persecution. The undisciplined person flops back and forth from side to side, falling by the way, first on one side and then the other. If we discipline ourselves to walk within the confines of His Will, we will be walking within the confines of that 'Narrow Way.' We can rest in Him, with a clear conscience if we are faithful to discipline ourselves; if not, then He will do the disciplining for us which is always far less desirable than if we choose to discipline ourselves. If we do, then we can always rest in Him, knowing that we stand in His Righteousness alone and that there is no work, whatsoever, that is needed for us to be completely acceptable to Him; that is what allows us to rest fully in Him. However, just to be clear: even when we don't discipline ourselves; even when we walk in a manner unworthy of the Gospel, we still stand in the complete Righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ because our righteousness is based on nothing else than Jesus' Blood and Righteousness. The only difference would be that we would not rest in His Righteousness; we would not have entered into His Rest. Our lives would be marked by restlessness and God's discipline.

That is why Paul tells us to 'walk worthy of the Lord,' to 'walk worthy of the Gospel' and to 'walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which we've been called.' Over and over, Paul stresses how important our 'walk' is but the importance is never in regard to salvation or worthiness in His sight, but, rather, always, in relation to our being able to enter into that rest, into His Rest.

Throughout Paul's writing, our 'walk,' our conduct, is not only as it relates to the World, but even more importantly, as we relate within the Body, within the Church, with each other, that we love each other being always patient, kind, longsuffering, etc. No matter how good we might look to those outside, no matter how good we might look to ourselves, if we do not love each other, always and sacrificially, then we are no more effective or attractive than a harsh gong or a clanging cymbal... our walk is meaningless without true love for each other, in the Body. After all, what is the purpose of the Gospel... that others come to Salvation.

Dissent within the Body of Christ always discredits the message of the Gospel... dissent, envy, jealousy, bitterness, unforgiveness... there is nothing attractive about the Gospel message when that is what is evidenced by those who claim to believe and walk in the light of the Gospel.

**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 we walk in love toward one another, it is our proof to ourselves and others that we are born again: **'We know** that we have passed from death to life, **because we love the brethren.** He who does not love his brother abides in death.' 1John 3:14

Because we recognize that we do, in fact, love other believers, we know we are children of God and that we can have full confidence in Him: 'Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh, and strength to your bones.' Prov 3:5

Because we do have confidence in the Lord, we can walk without fear of the World: 'The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked came against me to eat up my flesh, my enemies and foes, they stumbled and fell. Though an army may encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war may rise against me, in this I will be confident. One thing I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD All the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple. For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; in the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock. And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me; therefore I will offer sacrifices of joy in His tabernacle; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the LORD.' Psa 27

When we accurately understand our position in Jesus Christ, we can walk without fear. When we recognize that we have been faithful to crucify our own flesh, we rightly discern that we have no need to fear because our flesh is already dead; what more can they do? The World can only harm the body, our flesh; they can't touch our souls or spirits which are hidden with Christ, in God.

Jesus said: 'And 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. <sup>29</sup>Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. <sup>30</sup>But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. <sup>31</sup>Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.' Matt 10:28

When we understand that we are precious to God... each one of us, His children, that He was willing to offer up His Son to be crucified in order to bring us safely to Himself, then we can walk in full confidence and without any fear.

Instinctively, every unsaved person also understands the reality and truth of Who God is and also what awaits those who reject the Son Whom God freely offered; they know what their end will be so they fill their lives with as much distraction and diversion as possible so as not to think about their coming end. That is why they live lives of degradation, applauding and approving of each other.

'This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, <sup>18</sup>having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; <sup>19</sup>who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.' Eph 4:17

'And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; <sup>29</sup>being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, back-biters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, **that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.**' Rom 1:28

As the lost see our confident walk in God, loving each other and walking worthy of the Gospel, one of two things will happen in them: either they will hate us as they are reminded of their own destiny or God will grant them repentance and they will come to Him in humble faith.

Either God will give them over to a reprobate mind or He will grant to them, repentance.

'Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among

themselves,<sup>25</sup> who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them up to vile passions... And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting... who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.' Rom 1:24  
Either that, or: 'When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.'" Acts 11:18

'And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient,<sup>25</sup> in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.' 2 Tim 2:24

'Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?' Rom 2:4

After God grants repentance to a person and they are saved, by faith, He then grants them something else:

**Verse 29:** 'For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, *but also to suffer for His sake*,<sup>30</sup> having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me.'

That really doesn't sound like a very desirable 'grant, from the Lord.'

Persecution, genuine persecution of which, we've not yet really known much, here... persecution in the believer's life is a precious gift; not only because our persecution will result in unimaginable eternal rewards:

'Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.<sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.' Matt 5:11

'... and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.' Rom 8:17 'If we endure, We shall also reign with Him.' 2 Tim 2:12

'... for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.<sup>35</sup> Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward.<sup>36</sup> For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:' Heb 10:34

'By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.' Heb 11:24

But even more than our promised, expected eternal rewards from Jesus Christ for our suffering... our even greater promise is: 'that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings' Phpp 3:10

'... that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him.<sup>3</sup> And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.' John 17:2

'The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,<sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.' Rom 8:16

The reason persecution and suffering are such a precious gift, even to be hoped for is that, when we suffer for our commitment to Jesus Christ, two very important things happen: first, we come to know the Lord Jesus Christ more intimately when we share in the fellowship of His sufferings. The other thing that happens is that when we experience even a small amount of the suffering He went through for us, we come to better understand and experience His real love for us. When we imagine His suffering that was so far beyond our own, we come to appreciate His sacrifice and love for us even more than we had before and, so much more than do those who have never suffered for His sake. We gain a genuine heart of thankfulness and praise.