

When Dying is Gain

Philippians 1: 12-26—¹²Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. ¹³As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. ¹⁴Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly. ¹⁵It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. ¹⁶The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. ¹⁸But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, ¹⁹for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. ²⁰I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²²If 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! ²³I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. ²⁵Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.

Good morning, I'm Jeffrey Anderson; the teaching pastor here at Northlake Christian Church.

One word of clarification from last week. Last week I tried to recount in summary form the events that lead up to Paul's imprisonment in Rome, and his ultimate execution. However, I think I left the impression that when Paul went to Rome in Acts 28 that it was at that particular point that he was executed. In all likelihood that was not the time of his execution. He was probably released at that point, at least for a short time, and then later arrested again and only then he was executed.

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- The passage demonstrates an important principle of Pauline theology (one often missed by modern Christians, particularly in the affluent West) God works not merely in spite of but through adverse circumstances.

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- Apparently some of his critics thought Paul had either too thoughtless or too bull-headed by getting himself arrested. If, as is likely, he is writing from prison in Rome, he is awaiting trial before the Emperor, and Paul is in this situation because he himself had appealed to the Emperor (Acts 26). One can easily imagine the reasoning of Paul's critics.
 - Some were thinking that Paul was constantly rushing headlong into things where a wiser, cooler head would have been cautious. Why did he have to go up to Jerusalem and get himself arrested anyway?
- Who were these people who were preaching out of envy and rivalry?
 - It could not have been Judaizers as some commentators have suggested.
 - Paul calls them "brothers." He never called the Judaizers of Galatians 'brothers' but 'false brothers.'
 - They were Christian preachers, then, but divided people. Divided internally.
 - Their hearts were at war with their testimony. For even while they preached Christ they nourished emotion inimical to the gospel.
- **Question:** Who is it that is doing the preaching? The other apostles? The elders? Other leaders?
 - **Answer:** "the brothers."

but others out of goodwill.

- So it seems clear that there were two distinct groups regarding Paul:
 1. One group was very supportive.
 2. The other group, although made up of genuine believers, had it in for him, so to speak.
 - They used Paul's imprisonment as an opportunity to cause trouble for him.
 - **Application:** Have you ever known Christians that did not think that other Christians were actually born again?

¹⁶The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. ¹⁸But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

- There is great grace in Paul’s silence, and great wisdom too. It is (it seems) all too easy for someone new to a position to establish his or her own reputation at the expense of his or her predecessor.
 - The most regrettable aspects of sectarianism and denominationalism have always established their own identity and security by rebutting others.
- God can use unscrupulous televangelists, money-grubbing radio preachers, and sophisticated but unbelieving clergy to communicate his truth.
- The work is God’s, and when we find ourselves surrounded by unfaithful people who will not mend their ways, our joy will remain intact if we remember that God is in control and that wherever Christ is preached, God can advance the gospel.
- **J. A. Motyer:** “Differences of personal like and dislike will remain in the church; different stages of sanctification will mark individual Christians; different appreciations of what constitutes the will of God for a person’s life will continue to be expressed. But all these are secondary – secondary to the grand truth of individual redemption by the blood of Christ, of being accepted by God in Christ, and, what grips and controls Paul in his Roman jail, common possession of the saving truth of the gospel. If there is anything which, for us, fails to pale into insignificance, compared with the scriptural knowledge of Christ, then we are not living by the priorities of God.”¹

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice,¹⁹ for I know that through your prayers

- This is our responsibility to one another and something for which we depend on one another.
- We have an obligation to put one another’s spiritual growth in the very forefront of our prayers, and to take the responsibility very seriously.
- **Thielman:** “It is important to recognize that God ordains the prayers of his people as a means through which to accomplish his purposes, including his purposes for the perseverance of Christians in the faith and for their ultimate salvation. Paul did not conceive of sanctification and ultimate salvation as solely private enterprises. Individual Christians need the prayerful intercession of their brothers and sisters for their spiritual well-being so that they “may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ.”²
- Prayer for perseverance from the old *Presbyterian Book of Common Worship*:
 - “O God, who hast willed that the gate of mercy should stand open to the faithful; look on us, and have mercy upon us; that we who by Thy grace

¹ J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Philippians*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 80-80.

² See the sage comments of Moises Silva, *Philippians: Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989), 78-79.

are following the path of Thy will, may never turn aside from the ways of life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”³

- **Thielman**: “We should not assume in a culture that emphasizes the rights of the individual as heavily as Western culture that as their prayers for others somehow meet some need of their own. We tend to spend much of the time we devote to prayer asking God for things that will make our lives more pleasant, and since seeing friends and family members in difficult circumstances is unpleasant for us, we sometimes pray for their deliverance from hardship. The first step in applying this passage to ourselves, then, may simply be to ask God to give us a genuine love for other Christians and an understanding of their need for our prayers.”⁴

and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.

- Notice, that in this context “deliverance” does not mean release from imprisonment.
 - It means his ultimate vindication, whether in life or in death.
 - **This** will come about through **their** prayers.
 - Thus Paul’s driving concern is **not** that he should be released from jail or that, if he must die, he should have a relatively painless departure, but that he should do nothing of which he would some day be ashamed of.
 - **Romans 8:28** tells us about our personal history in which everything “God works for our good.”
 - Paul takes and accepts this great and comforting truth in a precise and unpleasant period of his life: ***This shall turn to my salvation (deliverance, vindication).***”
 - Paul’s attention is wholly occupied with one thing, to the exclusion of others...
- ²⁰**I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed,**
- He is absorbed in an *eager expectation*. The single Greek work here has three elements in it, ‘away’, ‘the head’ and ‘to watch’, and these are combined to give the idea of ‘watching something with the head turned away from other objects.’
 - Note: Paul’s driving concern was NOT about release, it was not for a painless death (if he must die), but that he would have...

but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body,

- Paul is determined to maintain an unblemished record: now as always

³ *Presbyterian Book of Common Worship*, 1906; as quoted by Thielman, 87.

⁴ Frank Thielman, *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 85. See also the valuable discussion of this issue in Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), 201.

- The literal translations, if anything, more striking: that ‘Christ will be enlarged in my body’.
- **The Westminster Confession:** “They whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.”⁵
- The way, however, in which God preserves us is through the means of grace.
- **Richard Sibbes** (known as “the sweet dropper”) plead with his church to “keep grace in exercise, because: “It is not sleepy habits, but grace in exercise, that preserveth us.”⁶

whether by life or by death. ²¹For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

- When is dying gain?
 - Dying can only be gain when we see that the promises of God are (really are) to be preferred more than life itself.
- What is the greatest thing that God could give you?
 - Most people tend to answer that question with something that suggests the idea of being made much of.
 - From the time we are little children we train our kids that to be loved means feeling that we are being made much of. “If you don’t make much of me you are not loving me.” Most of us can scarcely imagine anything other than such a view.
 - **Piper:** “This distortion of divine love into an endorsement of self-admiration is subtle. It creeps into our most religious acts. We claim to be praising God because of his love for us. But if his love for us is at bottom his making much of us, who is really being praised? We are willing to be God-centered, it seems, as long as God is man-centered. We are willing to boast in the cross as long as the cross is a witness to our worth. Who then is our pride and joy?”⁷
- **Don’t Waste Your Life:** “God’s glory shines more brightly when he satisfies us in times of loss than when he provides for us in times of plenty. The health, wealth, and prosperity ‘gospel’ swallows up the beauty of Christ in the beauty of his gifts and turns the gifts into idols. The world is not impressed when Christians get rich and say thanks to God. They are impressed when God is so satisfying that we give our riches away for Christ’s sake and count it gain.”⁸

⁵ *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 17: 1, <http://members.aol.com/RSISBELL/wcf5.html>.

⁶ Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1998), 104.

⁷ John Piper, *God is the Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), 12-13.

⁸ John Piper, *Don’t Waste Your Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003), 72.

- **Dietrich Bonhoeffer:** “The cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise God-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”⁹
- In short, until we see Heaven and the beauty of gaining God through Christ, dying will not be gain. It will be the worst of all possible offences. In the interest of self-interest, we will show that our greatest treasure is the treasures we gather to ourselves—but it will not be heavenly.
- **J. C. Ryle:** “I pity the man who never thinks about heaven.”¹⁰
 - **C. S. Lewis:** “It seems, then,” said Tirian, smiling himself, “that the Stable seen from within and the Stable seen from without are two different places.” “Yes,” said the Lord Digory. ***Its inside is bigger than its outside.***”
 - “I see,” [Lucy] said at last, thoughtfully. “I see now. This garden is like the Stable. It is far bigger inside than it was outside”...“In our world too, a Stable once had something inside it that was bigger than our whole world.” “Of course, Daughter of Eve,” said the Faun. “The further up and the further in you go, the bigger everything gets. The inside is larger than the outside.” Lucy looked hard at the garden and saw that it was not really a garden at all but a whole world, with its own rivers and woods and sea and mountains. But they were not strange: she knew them all. “I see,” she said. “This is still Narnia, and more real and more beautiful than the Narnia down below, just as *it* was more real and more beautiful than the Narnia outside and Stable door! I see . . . a world within world, Narnia within Narnia. . . .” “Yes,” said Mr. Tumnus, “like an onion: except that as you continue to go in and in, each circle is larger than the last.”...
 - Aslan spoke: “You do not yet look so happy as I mean you to be.”
 - Lucy said, “We’re so afraid of being sent away, Aslan. And you have sent us back into our own world so often.”
 - “No fear of that,” said Aslan. “Have you not guessed?”
 - Their hearts leaped and a wild hope rose within them.
 - “There *was* a real railway accident,” said Aslan softly. “Your father and mother and all of you are--as you used to call it in the Shadow-Lands--dead. The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning.” And as He spoke He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the

⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1963), 99.

¹⁰ J. C. Ryle, *Heaven* (Ross-sire: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), 19.

stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story, which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.¹¹

- **Piper:** “The extent of [a person’s] sacrifice and the depth of his joy display the worth he puts on the treasure of God. Loss and suffering, joyfully accepted for the kingdom of God, show the supremacy of God’s worth more clearly in the world than all worship and prayer.”¹²
- In just a couple of verses Paul will say, “For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him” (Philippians 1: 29).

The Martyrdom of Polycarp:

- 1 Now when Polycarp entered into the arena there came a voice from heaven: "Be strong, Polycarp, and play the man." And no one saw the speaker, but our friends who were there heard the voice. And next he was brought forward, and there was a great uproar of those who heard that Polycarp had been arrested. 2 Therefore when he was brought forward the Pro-Consul asked him if he were Polycarp, and when he admitted it he tried to persuade him to deny, saying: "Respect your age," and so forth, as they are accustomed to say: "Swear by the genius of Caesar, repent, say: `Away with the Atheists'"; but Polycarp, with a stern countenance looked on all the crowd of lawless heathen in the arena, and waving his hand at them, he groaned and looked up to heaven and said: "Away with the Atheists." 3 But when the Pro-Consul pressed him and said: "Take the oath and I let you go, revile Christ," Polycarp said: "For eighty and six years have I been his servant, and he has done me no wrong, and how can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"
- 1 But when he persisted again, and said: "Swear by the genius of Caesar," he answered him: "If you vainly suppose that I will swear by the genius of Caesar, as you say, and pretend that you are ignorant who I am, listen plainly: I am a Christian. And if you wish to learn the doctrine of Christianity fix a day and listen." 2 The Pro-Consul said: "Persuade the people." And Polycarp said: "You I should have held worthy of discussion, for we have been taught to render honour, as is meet, if it hurt us not, to princes and authorities appointed by God.

¹¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956), 165

¹² John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 71.

But as for those, I do not count them worthy that a defense should be made to them."

- 1 And the Pro-Consul said: "I have wild beasts. I will deliver you to them, unless you repent." And he said: "Call for them, for repentance from better to worse is not allowed us; but it is good to change from evil to righteousness." 2 And he said again to him: "I will cause you to be consumed by fire, if you despise the beasts, unless you repent." But Polycarp said: "You threaten with the fire that burns for a time, and is quickly quenched, for you do not know the fire which awaits the wicked in the judgment to come and in everlasting punishment. But why are you waiting? Come, do what you will."...
- 1 These things then happened with so great speed, quicker than it takes to tell, and the crowd came together immediately, and prepared wood and s from the work-shops and baths and the Jews were extremely zealous, as is their custom, in assisting at this. 2 Now when the fire was ready he put off all his clothes, and loosened his girdle and tried also to take off his shoes, though he did not do this before, because each of the faithful was always zealous, which of them might the more quickly touch his flesh. For he had been treated with all respect because of his noble life, even before his martyrdom. 3 Immediately therefore, he was fastened to the instruments which had been prepared for the fire, but when they were going to nail him as well he said: "Leave me thus, for He who gives me power to endure the fire, will grant me to remain in the flames unmoved even without the security you will give by the nails."
- 1 So they did not nail him, but bound him, and he put his hands behind him and was bound, as a noble ram out of a great flock, for an oblation, a whole burnt offering made ready and acceptable to God; and he looked up to heaven and said: "O Lord God Almighty, Father of thy beloved and blessed Child, Jesus Christ, through Whom we have received full knowledge of thee, the God of Angels and powers, and of all creation, and of the whole family of the righteous, who live before thee! 2 I bless thee, that Thou hast granted me this day and hour, that I may share, among the number of the martyrs, in the cup of thy Christ, for the Resurrection to everlasting life, both of soul and body in the immortality of the Holy Spirit. And may I, to-day, be received among them before Thee, as a rich and acceptable sacrifice, as Thou, the God who lies not and is truth, hast prepared beforehand, and shown forth, and fulfilled. 3 For this reason I also praise Thee for all things, I bless Thee, I glorify Thee through the everlasting and heavenly high Priest, Jesus Christ, thy beloved Child, through whom be glory to Thee with him and the Holy Spirit, both now and for the ages that are to come, Amen."
- 1 Now when he had uttered his Amen and finished his prayer, the men in charge of the fire lit it, and a great flame blazed up and we, to whom it was

given to see, saw a marvel. And we have been preserved to report to others what befell. 2 For the fire made the likeness of a room, like the sail of a vessel filled with wind, and surrounded the body of the martyr as with a wall, and he was within it not as burning flesh, but as bread that is being baked, or as gold and silver being refined in a furnace. And we perceived such a fragrant smell as the scent of incense or other costly spices.

- 1 At length the lawless men, seeing that his body could not be consumed by the fire, commanded an executioner to go up and stab him with a dagger, and when he did this, there came out a dove, and much blood, so that the fire was quenched and all the crowd marveled that there was such a difference between the unbelievers and the elect. 2 And of the elect was he indeed one, the wonderful martyr, Polycarp, who in our days was an apostolic and prophetic teacher, bishop of the Catholic Church in Smyrna. For every word which he uttered from his mouth both was fulfilled and will be fulfilled.¹³
- **Piper:** “Christ died for us so that we would not have to die for sin, NOT so that we would not have to die for others... The call to suffer with Christ is not a call to bear our sins the way he bore them but to love the way he loved. The death of Christ for the sin of my selfishness is not meant to help me escape the suffering of love but to enable it.”¹⁴

²²If 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! ²³I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far;

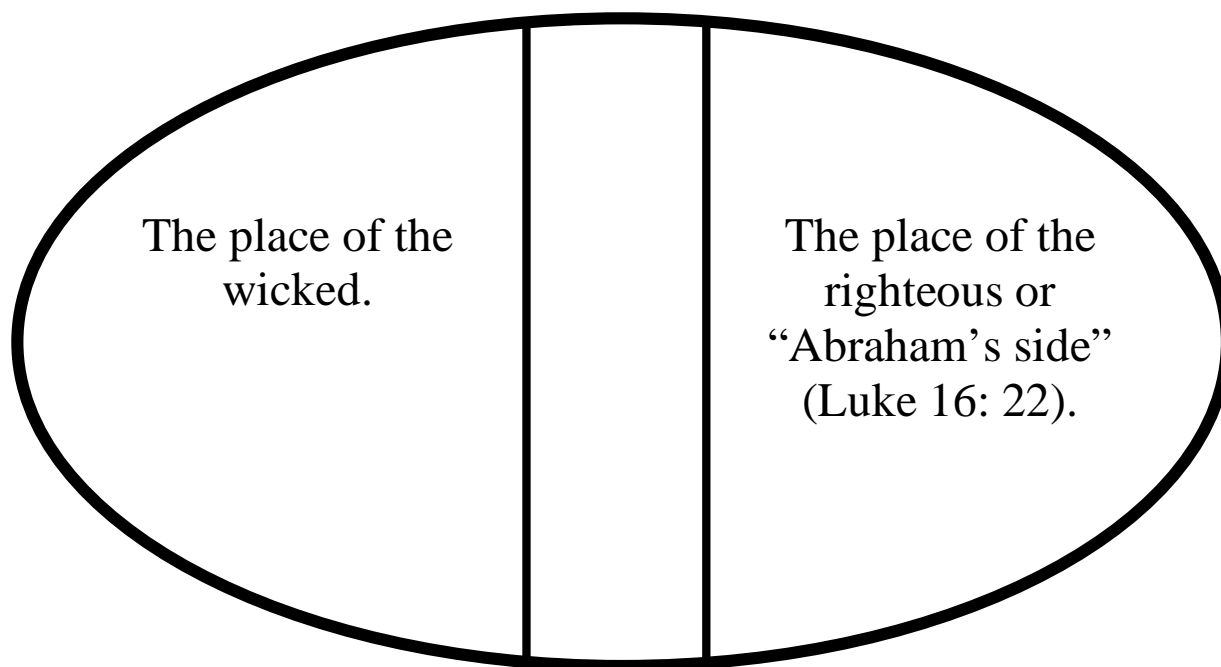
- The nature of a Christian death is ‘to depart’.
- This ‘departing’ is a weighing of the anchor’, a ‘setting sail’.
- **H. G. C. Moule** speaks of “that delightful moment when the friendly flood heaves beneath the freed keel, and the prow is set straight and finally towards the shore of home, and the Pilot stands on board, at length ‘seen face to face.’ And, lo, as He takes the helm, ‘immediately the ship is at the land whither they go’ (John 6:21)”¹⁵
- Death to the Christian is (literally) ‘by far the best’.

¹³ *Apostolic Fathers*, Kirsopp Lake, 1912 in the *Loeb Classical Library: Martyrdom of Polycarp*, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/martyrdompolyarp-lake.html>.

¹⁴ Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 77.

¹⁵ H. G. C. Moule, *The Second Epistle to Timothy* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1905), 140.

Sheol — The Place of the Dead (Luke 16: 19-31)



- Eph. 4: 8—"When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train."
- Now that Christ has been raised, when a Christian dies their spirit immediately goes into the presence of Christ Himself, even while his body is placed in the ground.
 - At the final resurrection the dead will be raised. Those who are in Christ will be reunited with their bodies, and the body will be changed into a resurrection body.
- **Carson:** "To die is to bring that ministry to an end. But even so there is only gain, since the ministry is not an end in itself, and it is now swallowed up in the glorious delight of the unshielded presence of the exalted Jesus himself."¹⁶
- This is not, of course, to say that mourning is out of place for the Christian when loved ones go to be with the Lord. This does not take away the fact that our experience is of loss.
 - In this same letter – bereavement brings: 'sorrow upon sorrow'.
- These two 'poles' of confidence and tears should mark our attitude to death. We should face death 'triumphantly' – but not with that heartless and glossy triumph which can amount to denigrating the goodness and grace of God in this life.

¹⁶ Don A. Carson, *Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 29.

- As far as personal enrichment was concerned, death would win hands down. But there is also the Philippian church. What of them? They still need his apostolic ministry. Paul believes it to be the will of the Lord.
 - **Carson:** “The lesson to be learned is startlingly clear: Put the converts of the gospel at the center of your principled self-denial. Paul’s deepest hopes for his own immediate future turn neither on the bliss of immediately gaining heaven’s portals nor on returning to a fulfilling ministry and escaping the pangs of death, but on what is best for his converts. Often we are tempted to evaluate alternatives by thinking through what seems best for us. How often do we raise as a first principle what is best for the church? When faced with, say, a job offer that would take us to another city or with mortal illness that calls forth our diligent intercession, how quickly do we employ Paul’s criterion here established: What would be best for the church? What would be best for my brothers and sisters in Christ?”¹⁷
 - “Soul sleep”?:
 - Death certainly would not have been “better by far” to Paul had he been conscious of any interval when he would not be with the Lord between his physical death and his physical resurrection.
- ²⁴but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. ²⁵Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.**
- When the Biblical truth of this theme grips you it frees you from fear and gives courage to live the most radical, self-sacrificing life of love.
 - But if you can't say, “To die is gain,” then you will probably say, to one degree or another, “Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die” (1 Cor. 15:32).
 - **C.S. Lewis:** “If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at Heaven and you will get Earth “thrown in”: aim at Earth and you will get neither.”¹⁸
 - Contrast the words of two different people who were facing death:

¹⁷ Carson, 30.

¹⁸ <http://www.bartleby.com/63/90/4190.html>.

- **Bertrand Russell** has been called the greatest mind of the twentieth century. Anticipating his death he said, "There is darkness without, and when I die there will be darkness within. There is no splendor, no vastness anywhere; only triviality for a moment, and then nothing."¹⁹
- An aging Christina said to John G. Paton when Paton was planning to go as a missionary to the South Sea Islands: "You will be eaten by Cannibals!" Paton replied,
 - "Mr. Dickson, you are advanced in years now, and your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave, there to be eaten by worms; I confess to you, that if I can but live and die serving and honoring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by Cannibals or by worms; and in the Great Day my resurrection body will arise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen Redeemer."²⁰

Application:

People have asked me, "Why do you keep stressing that the gospel is 'by faith'? I think most of us know that, why keep saying it over and over? Don't you think we have it?" And someone might rightfully ask, "What does that have to do with 'dying is gain'?" The issue keeps coming back to faith because we will never see dying as "gain" until we begin to believe (have faith in) the promises of God. For example, Jesus said "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). That is, you will be happier when you give than when you receive. The problem is: we don't believe that. In other words, it is a matter of faith; more specifically, a lack of faith. If we believed the promise of Christ we would invariably live differently. Let me ask you this: Which would you be more excited about: a. Discovering that someone unexpectedly gave you \$10,000? Or b., Realizing that now that you had some unexpected money you also had the opportunity to give away \$10,000.

Put the gospel first. So what is the first possible point of application? The most obvious answer is: Put the gospel first.

1. Put the fellowship of the gospel at the center of your relationships with believers.
2. Put the priorities of the gospel at the center of your prayer life.
3. Put the advance of the gospel at the center of your aspirations.
4. Put the converts of the gospel at the center of your principled self-denial.

¹⁹ Randy Alcorn, "Heaven: Our Certain Hope," <http://www.epm.org/articles/certain.html>.

²⁰ John G. Paton, *Missionary to the New Hebrides: An Autobiography Edited by His Brother*, (Revell, 1907), 56.

What is your greatest concern? Paul's greatest concern was that he would not do anything that would bring shame upon himself or the cause of Christ.

- Think about that for a moment: What is your greatest concern?
- Our concerns frequently revolve around our families, our jobs, our relatives, our friends, our homes, our vacations, our etc.
- Our greatest concern ought to be that we will never have to look back and feel a sense of shame, but that Christ will be enlarged in your body whether by life or by death.

Think about Heaven: The motivation for the Christian life is in considering the next life. "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field" (Matthew 13:44). Note, no matter how you cut it, the man in the story had to sacrifice everything he had—everything. By the time he was finished selling off what was necessary, there was nothing left. Yet, in the midst of all this sacrifice, he was happy. Can you imagine someone selling off everything they have, and as a result being so giddy and happy that they are beside themselves? This was precisely the man's situation in the story. So how could someone be so happy and joyful in the midst of such loss? The treasure that was worth far more than he ever could have imagined was his, yet it was completely unknown to everyone else. Hebrews 10: 33-35 says, "Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded." Note the attitude of the Hebrew Christians when people broke in and confiscated their property: joy. Such a response is completely absurd *unless* the last line is true: "you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions." Think about the unblushing promises of reward, joy and payback that are promised in the gospel.

A final illustration:

- Mehdi Dibaj, was imprisoned by the government of Iran in 1984 on charges of "apostasy", since he had converted from Islam to Christianity.
- Mehdi languished in prison for ten years before his case came to trial. His written statement of defense:
 - [Jesus Christ] is our Saviour and He is the Son of God. To know Him means to know eternal life. I, a useless sinner, have believed in His beloved person and all His words and miracles recorded in the Gospel, and I have committed by life into His hands. Life for me is an

opportunity to serve Him, and death is a better opportunity to be with Christ. Therefore I am not only satisfied to be in prison for the honour of His Holy Name, but am ready to give my life for the sake of Jesus my Lord. . . “

- On December 12, 1993, the court before whom this defense was made sentenced Mehdi to execution. Under intense pressure from people in the West who knew of the case, including the U.S. State Department, the Iranian government arranged Mehdi's release in January 1994. Seven months later, he was found dead “under suspicious circumstances” in a Tehran park.²¹

²¹ See “Christian Found Dead, Iran Says,” *The Boston Globe* (July 6, 1994), 8; “Prominent Church Leaders Slain,” *Christianity Today* (August 15, 1994), 54.