

Philippians 1:18-20

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's sermon on Philippians 1:18-20 emphasizes the joy found in suffering for Christ and the transformative power of hope and prayer in a believer's life.

Topics: "Faith And Hope", "Gods Providence"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the unwavering faith and hope of Paul, who rejoices in the face of adversity, knowing that his salvation is secured through the prayers of others and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Paul's steadfastness in the midst of trials, including persecution and slander, showcases his deep trust in God's provision and protection. Despite facing enemies and imminent danger, Paul remains confident that Christ will be magnified in his life, whether through life or death, demonstrating a profound commitment to glorifying God in all circumstances.

Transcript

And therein I rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your supplication, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope, that in nothing shall I be put to shame, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether by life, or by death.

None of the grievous things which are in this present life can fix their fangs upon that lofty soul, which is truly philosophic, neither enmity, nor accusations, nor slanders, nor dangers, nor plots. It flies for refuge as it were to a mighty fortress, securely defended there against all that attack it from this lower earth. Such was the soul of Paul; it had taken possession of a place higher than any fortress, the seat of spiritual wisdom, that is, true philosophy. For that of those without, i.e. the heathen, is mere words, and childish toys. But it is not of these we now speak, but at present concerning the things of Paul. That blessed one had both the Emperor for his enemy, and in addition, many other foes many ways afflicting him, even with bitter slander. And what says he? Not only do I not grieve nor sink beneath these things, but I even rejoice, yea, and will rejoice, not for a season, but always will I rejoice for these things. For I know that this shall turn out to my salvation, that which is to come, when even their enmity and jealousy towards me further the Gospel. Through your supplication, he adds, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ according to my earnest expectation and hope. Behold the humble-mindedness of this blessed one; he was striving in the contest, he was now close to his crown, he had done ten thousand exploits, for he was Paul, and what can one add to this? Still he writes to the Philippians, I may be saved through your

supplication, I who have gained salvation through countless achievements. And the supply, says he, of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. It is as though he said, if I am thought worthy of your prayers, I shall also be thought worthy of more grace. For the meaning of supply is this, if the Spirit be supplied to me, be given to me more abundantly. Or he is speaking of deliverance, unto salvation; that is, I shall also escape the present as I did the former danger. Of this same matter he says, At my first defense no one took my part, but all forsook me; may it not be laid to their account. But the Lord stood by me, and strengthened me. 2 Timothy 4:16 This then he now predicts: Through your supplication and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope, for thus do I hope. For that he may persuade us not to leave the whole matter to the prayers made for us, and contribute nothing ourselves, behold how he lays down his own part, which is Hope, the source of all good, as the Prophet says. Let your mercy, O Lord, be upon us, according as we have hoped in You. Psalm 33:22 And as it is written in another place, Look to the generations of old and see, did any one hope in the Lord, and was made ashamed? Sirach 2:10 And again, this same blessed one says, Hope puts not to shame. Romans 5:5 This is Paul's hope, the hoping that I shall nowhere be put to shame.

According to my earnest expectation and hope, says he, that in nothing shall I be put to shame. Do you see how great a thing it is to hope in God? Whatever happens, he says, I shall not be put to shame, i.e. they will not obtain the mastery, over me, but with all boldness, as always, so now also, Christ shall be magnified in my body. They forsooth expected to catch Paul in this snare, and to quench the preaching of the Gospel, as though their craftiness were of any power. This then, he says, shall not be so, I shall not now die, but as always, so now also, Christ shall be magnified in my body. How so? Ofttimes have I fallen into dangers, when all men gave us up, and what is more, when I myself did. For we had the answer of death within ourselves 2 Corinthians 1:9, but from all the Lord delivered me, so now too he shall be magnified in my body. What then? Lest any one should suppose and say, If you die, will He not then be magnified? Yes, he answers, I know He will; for this cause I did not say that my life alone shall magnify him, but my death too. At present he means by life; they will not destroy me; even did they so, Christ will even thus be magnified. How so? Through life, because He delivered me, but through my death, because even death itself could not persuade me to deny Him, since He gave me such readiness, and made me stronger than death. On the one hand because He freed me from peril; on the other, because He suffered me not to fear the tyranny of death: thus shall he be magnified through life and death. And this he says, not as though he were about to die, but lest on his death they should be affected as men are apt to be.

But that you may know these his words did not point to immediate death, the thought that pained them most, see how he relieves it by almost saying, These things I say, not as one about to die; wherefore he soon after adds, And having this confidence I know that I shall abide, yea and abide with you all. In nothing, says he, shall I be put to shame; that is, death brings no shame to me, but rather great gain. Why so? Because I am not immortal, but I shall shine more brightly than if I were so, for it is not the same thing for one immortal, and for one who is mortal, to despise death; so that not even instant death is shame to me, yet shall I not die; in nothing shall I be put to shame, neither in life nor death. For I will bear either nobly, whether life or death. Well says he! This is the part of a Christian soul! But he adds, with all boldness. Do you see how entirely I am freed from shame? For if the fear of death had cut short my boldness, death would have been worthy of shame, but if death at its approach cast no terror on me, no shame is here; but whether it be through life I shall not be put to shame, for I still preach the Preaching, or whether it be through death I shall not be put to shame; fear does not hold me back, since I still exhibit the same boldness. Do not, when I mention my bonds, think shame of the matter; so manifold good has it caused to me, that it has even given confidence to others. For that we should be bound for Christ, is no

shame, but for fear of bonds to betray anything that is Christ's, this is shame. When there is no such thing, bonds are even a cause of boldness. But since I have oftentimes escaped dangers, and have this to boast of to the unbelievers, do not straightway think I am put to shame, if now it should turn out otherwise. The one event no less than the other gives you boldness. Note how he brings this forward in his own person, which he does in many places, as in the Epistle to the Romans; For I am not ashamed of the Gospel. Romans 1:16 And again in that to the Corinthians; And these things I have in a figure transferred to myself and Apollos. 1 Corinthians 4:6-- Whether by life or by death: this he says not as in ignorance, (for he knew that he was not then to die, but some time after); yet even now does he prepare their soul.

Ver. 21. For to me, he says, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

For even in dying, he means, I shall not have died, for I have my life in myself: then would they truly have slain me, had they had power through this fear to cast faith out of my soul. But as long as Christ is with me, even though death overtake me, still I live, and in this present life, not this, but Christ is my life. Since, then, not even in the present life is it so, but that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith; so I say in that state also, I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me.

Galatians 2:20 Such ought a Christian to be! I live not, he says, the common life. How do you live then, O blessed Paul? Do you not see the sun, do you not breathe the common air? Are you not nourished with the same food as others? Do you not tread the earth as we? Do you not need sleep, nor clothing, nor shoes? What do you mean by, I live not? How do you not live? Why boastest you yourself? No boasting is here. For if indeed the fact did not witness to him, a man might with some show have called it boasting; but if facts do witness, how is boasting here?

Let us then learn how he lives not, for he himself says in another place, I have been crucified to the world, and the world to me. Galatians 6:14 Hear then how he says, I no longer live. And how he says, to me to live is Christ. The word life is much significant, beloved, as also the word death. There is this life of the body, there is the life of sin, as he himself elsewhere says, But if we died to sin, how shall we any longer live therein? Romans 6:2 It is then possible to live the life of sin.

Attend diligently, I entreat you, lest my labor be vain. There is the life everlasting and immortal; with eternal life the heavenly; for our citizenship, says he, is in heaven Philippians 3:20 There is the life of the body whereof he speaks, through him we live and move and have our being. Acts 17:28 He does not then deny that he lives the natural life, but that of sin, which all men live. He who desires not the present life, how does he live it? He who is hastening to another, how does he live this life?

He who despises death, how does he live this life? He who desires nothing, how does he live it? For as one made of adamant, though he were struck a thousand blows, would never attend to it, no more would Paul. And I live, says he, but no longer I, that is, no longer the old man; as again elsewhere, Wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me out of the body of this death! Romans 7:24 How too does he live who does nought for the sake of food, nought for the sake of clothing, nought for any of these present things?

Such an one does not even live the natural life: he who takes thought for none of the things which sustain life, lives not. We live this life, whose every action regards it. But he lived not; he busied himself about nought of the things here. How then lived he? Just as we are accustomed to say, in common matters, such an one is not with me, when he does nothing that pertains to me. Again, in like sort, such a man lives not for me. Elsewhere he shows that he rejects not the natural life: The life which I now live in the flesh, I live in the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me Galatians 2:20; i.e. a certain

new life I live, an altered one.

And truly all these things he said to comfort the Philippians. Think not, says he, that I shall be deprived of this life, for neither while alive did I live this life, but that which Christ willed. For tell me? He who despises money, luxury, hunger, thirst, dangers, health, safety, does he live this life? He who has nothing here, and is oftentimes willing to cast life away, if need be, and clings not to it, does he live this life? By no means. This I must make clear to you by a kind of example.

Let us imagine some one in great wealth, with many servants, and much gold, and who makes no use of all these things; is such an one rich for all his wealth? By no means. Let him see his children dissipating his property, strolling idly about; let him feel no concern for them; when beaten let him not even be pained; shall we call him a man of wealth? By no means; although his wealth is his own. To me, he says, to live is Christ; if you will enquire of my life, it is He. And to die is gain.

Wherefore? Because I shall more clearly be present with Him; so that my death is rather a coming to life; they who kill me will work on me no dreadful thing, they will only send me onward to my proper life, and free me from that which is not mine. What then, while thou were here, were thou not Christ's? Yes, and in a high degree.

Ver. 22. But if to live in the flesh -- if this is the fruit of my work, then what I shall choose I know not.

Lest any should say, If what you say is life, wherefore has Christ left you here? It is, he says, the fruit of my work; so that it is possible to use to good purpose the present life, while not living it. Lest you should think that reproach is cast upon life. For if we gain no advantage here, wherefore do we not make away with ourselves, nor slay ourselves? By no means, he answers. It is open to us to profit even here, if we live not this, but another life. But perchance one will say, does this bear you fruit? Yes! He answers. Where are now the heretics? Behold now; to live in the flesh, this is the fruit of his work. That which I now live in the flesh, I live in faith; therefore it is the fruit of my work.

And what I shall choose I know not. Marvelous! How great was his philosophy! How has he both cast out the desire of the present life, and yet thrown no reproach upon it! For in that he says, to die is gain, by this he has cast out the desire, but in that he says, to live in the flesh is the fruit of my work, here he shows that the present life also is needful, if we use it as need is, if we bear fruit; since if it be unfruitful, it is no longer life. For we despise those trees which bear no fruit, as though they were dry, and give them up to the fire. Life itself belongs to that middle class of indifferent things, while to live well or ill is in ourselves. We do not then hate life, for we may live well too. So even if we use it ill, we do not even then cast the blame on it. And wherefore? Because not itself, but the free choice of those who use it ill is to blame. For God has made you live, that you may live to Him. But you, by living through corruption unto sin, makest yourself accountable for all blame. What do you say, tell me. You know not what to choose? Here has he revealed a great mystery, in that his departure was in his own power; for where choice is, there have we power. What I shall choose, says he, I know not. Is it in your own power? Yes, he answers, if I would ask this grace of God.

Ver. 23. I am in a strait between the two, having the desire.

See the affection of this blessed one; in this way too he comforts them, when they see that he is master of his own choice, and that this is done not by man's sin, but by the dispensation of God. Why mourn ye, says he, at my death? It had been far better to have passed away long since. For to depart, he says, and

to be with Christ, is very far better.

Ver. 24. Yet to abide in the flesh is more needful for your sake.

These words were to prepare them for his death when it came, that they might bear it nobly: this was to teach true wisdom. It is good for me to depart and be with Christ, for even death is a thing indifferent; since death itself is no ill, but to be punished after death is an ill. Nor is death a good, but it is good after our departure to be with Christ. What follows death is either good or ill.

Let us then not simply grieve for the dead, nor joy for the living simply. But how? Let us grieve for sinners, not only when dying, but also while living. Let us joy for the just, not only while living, but also when dead. For those though living are dead, while these although dead, yet live: those even while here are to be pitied of all, because they are at enmity with God; the other even when they have departed Thither, are blessed, because they are gone to Christ. Sinners, wherever they are, are far from the King. Therefore they are subjects for tears; while the just, be they here, or be they there, are with the King; and there, in a higher and nearer degree, not through an entrance, or by faith, but face to face. 1 Corinthians 13:12

Let us then not make wailings for the dead simply, but for those who have died in sins. They deserve wailing; they deserve beating of the breast and tears. For tell me what hope is there, when our sins accompany us Thither, where there is no putting off sins? As long as they were here, perchance there was great expectation that they would change, that they would become better; but when they are gone to Hades, where nought can be gained from repentance (for it is written, In Sheol who shall give you thanks?)

Psalms 6:5, are they not worthy of our lamentation? Let us wail for those who depart hence in such sort; let us wail, I hinder you not; yet in no unseemly way, not in tearing our hair, or baring our arms, or lacerating our face, or wearing black apparel, but only in soul, shedding in quiet the bitter tear. For we may weep bitterly without all that display. And not as in sport only. For the laments which many make differ not from sport. Those public mournings do not proceed from sympathy, but from display, from emulation and vainglory.

Many women do this as of their craft. Weep bitterly; moan at home, when no one sees you; this is the part of true sympathy; by this you profit yourself too. For he who laments another in such sort, will be much the more earnest never to fall into the same sins. Sin henceforth will be an object of dread to you. Weep for the unbelievers; weep for those who differ in nowise from them, those who depart hence without the illumination, without the seal! They indeed deserve our wailing, they deserve our groans; they are outside the Palace, with the culprits, with the condemned: for, Verily I say unto you, Unless a man be born of water and the Spirit, he shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven.

Mourn for those who have died in wealth, and did not from their wealth think of any solace for their soul, who had power to wash away their sins and would not. Let us all weep for these in private and in public, but with propriety, with gravity, not so as to make exhibitions of ourselves; let us weep for these, not one day, or two, but all our life. Such tears spring not from senseless passion, but from true affection. The other sort are of senseless passion. For this cause they are quickly quenched, whereas if they spring from the fear of God, they always abide with us.

Let us weep for these; let us assist them according to our power; let us think of some assistance for them, small though it be, yet still let us assist them. How and in what way? By praying and entreating others to

make prayers for them, by continually giving to the poor on their behalf. This deed has some consolation; for hear the words of God Himself, when He says, I will defend this city for My own sake, and for My servant David's sake. 2 Kings 20:6 If the remembrance only of a just man had so great power when deeds are done for one, how great power will it not have?

Not in vain did the Apostles order that remembrance should be made of the dead in the dreadful Mysteries. They know that great gain results to them, great benefit; for when the whole people stands with uplifted hands, a priestly assembly, and that awful Sacrifice lies displayed, how shall we not prevail with God by our entreaties for them? And this we do for those who have departed in faith, while the catechumens are not thought worthy even of this consolation, but are deprived of all means of help save one.

And what is this? We may give to the poor on their behalf. This deed in a certain way refreshes them. For God wills that we should be mutually assisted; else why has He ordered us to pray for peace and the good estate of the world? Why on behalf of all men? Since in this number are included robbers, violators of tombs, thieves, men laden with untold crimes; and yet we pray on behalf of all; perchance they may turn. As then we pray for those living, who differ not from the dead, so too we may pray for them.

Job offered sacrifice for his children, and freed them from their sins. It may be, said he, that they have renounced God in their hearts. Job 1:5 Thus does one provide for one's children! He said not, as many do nowadays, I will leave them property; he said not, I will procure them honor; he said not, I will purchase an office; he said not, I will buy them land; but, it may be that they have renounced God in their hearts. For what profit is there in those things? None at all, in those that remain here.

I will make the King of all things favorable to them, and then they will no more want any thing. The Lord, says one, is my Shepherd, I shall not want. Psalm 23:4 This is great wealth, this is treasure. If we have the fear of God, we want nothing; if we have not this, though we have royalty itself, we are the poorest of all men. Nothing is like the man that fears the Lord. For the fear of the Lord, it is said, surpasses all things. Sirach 25:11 This let us procure; let us do all things for its sake.

If need be that we lay down our lives, if our body must be mangled, let us not spare them; let us do all, to obtain this fear. For thus shall we abound above all men; and shall obtain those good things to come in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom, etc.

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