

Worst Case Scenario

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[0 : 00] Well, Paul is in prison in Rome. He's been there for perhaps four years in prison, and he's writing this letter to the church at Philippi, and he really loves this church.

And we noticed the first week when we looked at this book, he loves this church because he knows that their faith in Jesus is authentic faith, and they are faithful supporters of his ministry.

And this letter includes really good news. As a direct result of his imprisonment, something that perhaps they had heard about and wondered if this was going to, you know, thwart God's plans for the spreading of the gospel, Paul says no.

As a direct result of his imprisonment, the gospel is advancing, and it's advancing in two wonderful ways. First, it's advancing because some who would otherwise never hear the gospel are having an opportunity to hear it, such as the emperor's bodyguard.

But secondly, Christians who otherwise would not be preaching the gospel, perhaps because they were too timid or they thought, well, we have Paul and he can get the job done.

[1 : 17] Suddenly, Paul is removed and he's in prison. He's been there now for four years, and now Christians who otherwise would not preach the gospel have begun to preach the gospel, and they're doing so boldly and courageously.

And so Paul celebrates the gospel's advance in both of these areas. Paul is thrilled about this. He doesn't even care that some of these preachers are egotistical and envious of him, and he does not care that some of these preachers intend to make his suffering in prison worse.

So long as they preach the true gospel, the message of hope through the life and the death and the resurrection of Jesus, the message of hope for sinners, as long as they preach this good news, then Paul rejoices.

And he's not done rejoicing. Tim will read for us Philippians chapter 1, starting at verse 18, and we're going to go down through verse 26.

See if you can pick up on why Paul continues to rejoice. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

[2 : 37] Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, in this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage, now as always, Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. For if I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose, I cannot tell, for I am hard-pressed between the two.

My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for it is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus because of my coming to you again.

Thanks, Tim. On Christmas Eve, several of my nieces and nephews introduced me to a game. It's called The Worst Case Scenario.

Are you familiar with this? Apparently some folks invented this game in 2020 when we were all in one way or another sort of living out the worst case scenario. Okay?

[4 : 01] So here's how the game works. The person whose turn it is gets these cards and then they arrange these cards in the order from the worst case scenario down to what is like, well, that's not such a big deal.

The only thing is they're all bad. Like really bad. I'll give you some examples. Step barefoot through a rusty nail.

Develop a strange condition that turns your skin blue. What do you think, Josie? That's a bad one, isn't it? That's pretty bad. No one wants to look like a smurf.

Swim. Swim in shark-infested waters. Owen? I saw you go like this. That sounded like a bad one? Okay, how about this one? Tied up and tickled for 10 minutes. Ava, you think that's a bad one? That'd be a fun one?

[5 : 08] Not Ava's worst case scenario? Okay. I looked through several of these yesterday. This would very easily be in my top five worst.

Compete in a mayonnaise eating contest. Isn't that awful? That's awful. Now, for most people, death is our worst case scenario.

Would you agree that for most people that's true? The great unknown. We don't know what will that be like. What will it feel like? Will I feel anything?

We don't know. Death, for most people, is a worst case scenario. But in this text, Paul offers the Philippians a different perspective.

For followers of Jesus, death is not our worst case scenario. It's actually our best case scenario.

[6 : 16] Which means, because death is now our best case scenario. What used to be our worst has now become our best.

And that means that a life well lived for the good of others and the glory of Jesus Christ becomes a clear and obvious choice for Christians.

Since your worst is really your best, then living for Jesus makes sense. That's what I want to try to argue for today.

Are you with me on this? Okay, let's do it. Paul celebrates the gospel's advance in Rome, and he continues to rejoice. Look again at verse number 18.

What does it matter? What does it matter? Only that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is proclaimed.

[7 : 17] And in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice. Why, Paul? Because I know this, this, my imprisonment, will lead to my salvation.

This will lead to my salvation. Through your prayers and help from the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

Now, if you look in your Bible and you see that word salvation, I think the ESV says deliverance in verse 19.

Some interpret this to mean Paul is describing freedom from prison. I think I messed it up now.

Freedom from prison. But as though Paul, you know, is anticipating some kind of a jailbreak, like what happened in Acts 16.

I would like to humbly disagree with that interpretation, and I want to tell you why. First, to me, that interpretation does not make logical sense.

[8 : 30] And I'll tell you an illustration. I think at the end of the illustration, you'll see why maybe that doesn't make logical sense. So imagine if I get arrested, and did some of you not have to imagine that too hard?

Come on. Come on. Imagine, imagine I get arrested, and I use my one call to call who? Lois, obviously.

I use my one call to call Lois, and I say this. Listen, love, it's going to be okay. My imprisonment is going to result in my freedom.

We hang up, and the kids gather around her, and they say, what did he say? What did he say? And she says, he said that his imprisonment will result in his salvation, his freedom, his deliverance.

This would be like one of those visible confusion moments, right? Like, is this a riddle? Is this a secret code? Is there a code word there that we were supposed to understand?

[9 : 45] I don't understand. That doesn't make any sense. That doesn't make, to me, grammatical sense to say that Paul is arguing that his imprisonment is somehow going to result in his deliverance from imprisonment.

More importantly than this grammatical thing, I think there are clues in the text that Paul has something bigger in mind. And this is what we should be mostly concerned about, right? Not whether it grammatically makes sense in English to us, but whether Paul, whether we can discern some clues from the text.

Look down in verse 20. I want you to see these clues so that we can learn to study together. Paul says this, So we have these two verses, 19 and then 20.

He says this will lead to my salvation. If you're into the Old Testament and you like to study and make some connections between the New and the Old Testament, Paul here quotes directly from Job chapter 13 and verse number 16.

It's a word-for-word quote. Paul may very well have intended his readers to notice that, or perhaps Paul just had it on his mind.

[11:09] But either way, when Job is talking in that portion of the book of Job, he's talking about eternal realities.

He's talking about his relationship with God. He's talking about his spiritual destiny. He's not there in those moments concerned about the here and now.

He's thinking much bigger picture. Paul uses this phrase, eager expectation. And you might be familiar with that phrase because he quotes this also in Romans 8.

It is the creation that groans as it waits with eager longing, is how it comes to us in Romans chapter 8. Eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

Do you see how these words seem to lift our thinking away from what is happening to Paul in prison and onto something bigger? He also mentions in verse 20, not being ashamed.

[12:12] And most often in the New Testament, when we think about being unashamed, it typically is associated with the judgment when Jesus returns. I believe these textual clues point us away from seeing salvation or deliverance here as a reference to his freedom from imprisonment.

Instead, I want to suggest that Paul wants the Philippians to know that it is true for him what he has said is true for them.

That the one who began a good work in him will see it through to completion until the day of Jesus Christ. God will continue to do the work until he is finally and fully saved.

Now, this can be a little tricky, and so I want us to be very careful together. The moment that you are born again, and by grace through faith, trust in Jesus, you are saved.

Your sins, past, present, and future, are fully and freely forgiven. Christ's righteousness is yours. God is your father. You are saved.

[13:33] You cannot be more secure than that. And you are also follower of Jesus being saved. It would be nice if God immediately took away everything inside of us that was sinful, everything that tempts us, everything that draws us towards the darkness and out of the light.

That would save us a lot of pain and trouble, wouldn't it? I mean, a lot of pain and trouble. But God has chosen to change us little by little, moment by moment, day by day, often through suffering and adversity and trial and hardship.

And so it is true also, you are being saved. But even when your sanctification, in other words, this process of being made more godly, this process of being made more like Jesus, even when this process feels unbearably, tediously slow, and you wonder, why do I keep struggling with these same sins?

You can be sure of this. Paul has already written it to us in the first portion of this first chapter. God is faithful to finish what he starts.

And it seems like it is this finishing that Paul has in mind when he mentions his salvation. Being imprisoned is going to result in his salvation.

[15:10] Why? Because he is being changed to be more and more like Jesus while he is there. God saved Paul on the road to Damascus.

Kids, do you remember that one? Jesus knocked him right off his high horse, didn't he? Right off his high horse. Right down to the ground.

Blinded him. God saved Paul. And God is saving Paul through the work of the Holy Spirit.

And Paul declares it here. I will finally also be saved when Jesus returns. Is Paul secure now? Oh, yes.

Are you secure now, child of God? Oh, yes. God is saving you. Sins past, present, and future forgiven. And yet, God's work in you will continue until God finally and fully saves you.

[16:16] Brothers and sisters, this is our testimony as well. God saved me. God is saving me. God will finally save me. And so, Paul rejoices, not in the freedom, not in the hope of freedom from prison, but because he is confident in God's faithfulness to finish the work of salvation.

So, there is no longer a worst-case scenario for Paul. Whether he lives or dies, he plans to glorify Jesus.

Look in verse 20 again. My eager expectation and hope is that I will not be ashamed about anything, but that now, as always, with all courage, Christ will be highly honored in my body, whether by life or death.

No worst-case scenario. Wouldn't it be wonderful to have this hope? I mean, wouldn't it be wonderful for this hope to be growing inside of you, that in life or in death, we glorify Jesus? Is that what you want? Is that what we want as a church? Paul lets us in here on what is necessary for this to be true. It's back up in verse 19.

[17:46] Your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus. Would you pray for me?

Would you pray for me? Because my future salvation depends on it. In other words, my preservation in faith depends on the prayers of fellow believers and the help of the Holy Spirit. We need one another. We need one another. We feel it, don't we? Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love. What is going to preserve us in faith? Oh yes, the power of God. Yes, the power of God.

And what is the means by which that happens? The prayers of the saints and the help of the Holy Spirit. Let's not forget Jesus' words in John chapter 15.

[19:00] Apart from me, you can do nothing. Oh, how we need the powerful help of the Holy Spirit.

Paul's joyful confidence in future salvation and his desire to glorify Jesus, no matter what, can hardly be more clear than when he writes verse 21.

For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

This is clear and unambiguous, isn't it? But I want you to notice that that doesn't mean that Paul arrives at this conclusion easily. Look at verse 22, because it seems as though he's indecisive. Now, if I live on in the flesh, this means fruitful work for me. And I don't know which one I should choose.

[20:04] In other words, he's saying, I would love to die and go and be with Jesus, but I also know there is important work to be done here, and I need to stay here and remain.

And he says, I don't know which one I should choose. He sounds indecisive. But then verse 23 gives us some insight into this very real tension that Paul is feeling.

Look in your Bible. You'll probably see the word torn. You might see the word hard-pressed. Hard-pressed, perhaps, in your Bible. Does somebody have another one they want to share? Torn, hard-pressed. Okay? Now, this word is the same word that is used in Matthew chapter 4 to describe demonic oppression.

Now, we know that Paul is not being oppressed by a demon. The point is that we are to recognize that Paul is really feeling the tension of this decision.

[21:12] Whether to die and go and be with Jesus, or whether to live on and be fruitful for him here in his ministry.

This is a real tension for Paul. I'll offer one additional cross-reference. In Luke 22, 63, when Jesus is being tortured, this same word is used to describe the soldiers holding onto Jesus while he is beaten.

I imagine two big old soldiers holding on either side of Jesus, and another soldier coming up and smacking him or punching him or pulling out part of his beard or smacking him on the head with a stick.

He's torn. Do you see that word picture? Paul is feeling this decision. I imagine it might be a little bit like this picture.

Maybe you've seen it before. Which shall I choose? Die and be with Jesus, or live for Jesus?

[22:36] Now, Paul's personal preference, if he got to make this choice, it would be to die and be with Jesus. He calls this decision far better.

And then he momentarily seems almost embarrassed at what he would choose. Almost embarrassed that he would say, I would rather go and be with Jesus.

And so he then immediately acknowledges that it is more necessary for him to stay alive for the sake of the Philippians.

Look in your Bible in verse 23, and we'll see this. I am torn between the two. I long to depart and be with Christ.

Which is far better. Amen? But, but, to remain in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.

[23:39] Since I am persuaded of this, of what? That it is more necessary to remain in the flesh for the sake of others.

Not Christ and being right. Not Christ and being respected or understood or appreciated. Friends, we don't live for Christ and. We live for Christ. The real worst case scenario for a follower of Jesus is not death. The real worst case scenario for a follower of Jesus is living and being willing to die for something other than or in addition to Jesus Christ.

For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. What is the and that you would drop in that phrase? That you would sort of insert into that. For me to live is Christ and what?

My brother, my sister, open your arms. Open your arms and let go of whatever else, whatever the and is, that fills your arms and let Jesus hold you.

[32 : 06] And as you rest in the security of Jesus's love for you, the Holy Spirit will teach you to say, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Jesus has made my worst case scenario my best case scenario and now living for him makes sense.

Let's pray. Father, we are grateful for your word and we are grateful for your Holy Spirit. Lord Jesus, you know all of our ands that we insert into that phrase.

And it was for all of those ands that you came and died. You loved us when we were unlovely.

You suffered for the sake of your enemies. You died while we were ungodly.

[33 : 35] And in your bloody death and the atoning work that you accomplished on the cross, we have forgiveness.

And so we rest in the forgiveness that is ours because of what you accomplished on the cross.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you for bearing up under the wrath of God that should have fallen on us. And for taking away our sin and our guilt as far as the East is from the West.

We believe this is true because we know that your love, your steadfast love, your faithfulness extends to the clouds.

It is as high as the heavens are above the earth. Thank you for loving us. Holy Spirit, please continue to do work in our hearts as we continue this time of worship.

[34 : 43] We are grateful for your word. We're grateful even for the conviction that it brings us. And we are grateful for the hope of the gospel and the security of being in Christ.

We're humbled by the prayers of our brothers and sisters that we would remain faithful. Help us to be able to say, for me to live is Christ.

Nothing else. For me to live is Christ and to die is gain. We love you and we are grateful to be your children. Please help us as we continue. It's in Jesus' name that we pray.

Amen. Amen.