

Pastor's Message – 9/24/23  
Philippians 1:21-30

I subscribe to Paramount + as my only streaming service – just for the Star Trek shows and a couple weeks ago, I received an invitation to respond to a survey. One of the questions concerned whether I prefer an episodic or a serial format for the shows: whether the whole story is contained in every hour-long show or whether the storyline continues throughout the season or across seasons.

That got me thinking about our Bible passage today from Paul's Letter to the Philippians. He's writing about much the same thing: whether and how the life of a believer is lived here on earth or if a believer's life finds its ultimate end in heaven, with the Lord.

If you've read through the entirety of the Letter to the Philippians, you have probably noticed that it is a letter of joy. Why is that? Considering his circumstances, how can that be? What's happening with Paul as he writes this letter?

First, Paul is writing from prison? He is in prison. His future, his life, is in doubt. He's straddling the line between life and death and wonders which is better for him. If he lives, he'll continue to engage in "fruitful labor," and he knows that such work is beneficial to the Philippians (vv. 22, 24). But if he dies, he'll "depart and be with Christ" (v. 23). He seems to be leaning toward life, so he writes, "I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again" (vv. 25-26). What's the next thing for the apostle Paul? He is contemplating both his present and his future.

When I meet someone, I will often ask how they're doing. Often, I will get a response like: "standing vertical, taking nourishment." These are meant as good things, meaning that they are still living in this world. Paul questions whether that is the better thing. Oftentimes, people reflect the feeling that this life is the better alternative to death and the afterlife.

A study that I'm aware of looked at hospice workers and other end-of-life professionals. For these people, exposure to death causes them to "live in the present, cultivate a spiritual life and reflect deeply on the continuity of life." In a similar manner, people who have near-death experiences report an increased sense of spiritual well-being. People who are suffering in this life don't always have the same healthy attitude Paul has that "living means living for Christ, and dying is even better." (Phil. 1.21) Some are torn along





