

Gems from Philippians

1 – Life's Goal and Purpose (Phil 1.12-24)

The church at Philippi began when Paul visited that city on his second missionary journey. It began with the conversion of Lydia and, after Paul and Silas were put in prison, included the prison keeper and his family (Acts 16.12-40). This small and persecuted church kept in close touch with Paul and often sent him gifts. He speaks of them as his "joy and crown".

Here Paul is in prison again, probably in Rome and under house arrest (Acts 28.16), awaiting trial and chained to a Roman guard (v.17). He was free to write his letters, to receive visitors and to witness to his guards.

vv.12-14: Paul assures them that his imprisonment has not dampened or discouraged him. He is still full of the glory and purpose of Christ and sees the gospel spreading throughout the world including some "of Caesar's household" (4.32).

vv.15-18: As Christianity spread quite a number of itinerant preachers and teachers emerged. Some were supporters of Paul and some were not. The latter stirred up religious and social controversy and rivalry. What does it matter, says Paul, as long as Christ is preached.

vv. 19-24: Paul hopes soon to be tried and acquitted and out in the world preaching Christ again. He really doesn't know which is best: to be put to death and be with Christ in glory or to remain and be the servant of Christ here on earth. "For me to live is Christ", he says "and to die is gain". He is content to leave his life and future in God's hands.

Questions for discussion:

1. What is the greatest thing in life for you? What do you live for? For Paul it is Christ. How important is He in your life? Discuss.
2. When Paul and Silas were put in prison in Philippi, beaten and in the stocks, they prayed aloud and sang praises to God (Acts 16.23-25). Have you ever been mocked or ill treated because of your faith? How did you feel? What did you do?
3. See 1.12 and 4.22. There were Christians among Paul's guards and even in Caesar's own household, some probably converted directly through Paul. Why didn't Paul persuade them to help him escape?
4. At various times there has been criticism and rivalry between Christians and denominations (as in v.15-18). How Christian or unchristian is this? Does it matter?
5. "To die is gain"; "to depart and be with Christ is far better". Do you believe that? If so why do we mourn when a Christian loved one dies?
6. Throughout this passage, as throughout the whole letter, the word "Joy" keeps coming up (v.18, 19, 25, 26). But Paul is imprisoned and chained up. How do you explain his joy?
7. Paul was greatly cheered by the Philippians care for him. How much are we showing our concern and care to Christians in the world imprisoned or persecuted for their faith? What could we and what should we do?
8. It would be quite possible to relax and say "My life is in God's hands" and do nothing. Would this be Christian faith? Why or why not?