

Biblical Reflection 15: “Why should we go on living”

June 20, 2021



Thousands are languishing in prisons throughout Myanmar, while millions of others feel imprisoned in their own homes or trapped in circumstances beyond their control. For some, the discouragement and frustration weigh on them like a heavy blanket that they can't shake off. One of my Burmese students certainly speaks for many, many people in Myanmar, when he says, “I feel that every dream I had was broken and destroyed. I have very little hope.” Under such cruel and oppressive conditions, some of you may even be wondering if life is worth living anymore.

Perhaps shockingly, even the Apostle Paul wrestled with this same question. When all his plans for spreading the Gospel suddenly came to a halt and he was thrown into prison in Rome, he had good reasons to prefer death over life. He knew that it would be better to die and go to be with Christ, but he also knew that as long as he was alive, God had work for him to do. For Paul, that meant, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ to those who did not know him. It also meant teaching, strengthening, and encouraging his fellow believers, who were facing similar hardships and suffering. But which would he choose—life or death?

When the Philippian Christians became worried about him in prison, he explained why he still wanted to live, and what he was focusing on in the midst of his suffering. He said: “I want you to know, beloved, that what has happened to me [my imprisonment] has actually helped to spread the gospel.... It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame in any way, but that ... Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain.... My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith” (From Phil. 1:12, 20-26, NRSV).

What an amazing perspective! Instead of talking about his suffering, Paul wanted them to know that his time in prison gave him new opportunities to share the Gospel. Instead of seeking death, he was thinking about living for the sake of those he cared about. Although dying would have been “gain” for him (because he was confident that he would spend eternity in the presence of God), he was more concerned about serving Christ than serving himself.

My heart continues to break every time I think about what so many of you are going through, and I pray daily for you to be able to face all that you must endure. I have never been in the same horrible situation that you are in; but I know that the Holy Spirit wants to give you

strength, courage, and hope in your suffering. Keep believing that God loves you and still has a good purpose for your life, even when everything seems to be going wrong. The Apostle Paul never fulfilled all his dreams and plans in his life, but God still used him in many ways that fit with Christ's good purposes for him. If you follow Paul's example, God will do that for you, too. Your life still has meaning and purpose, and there is hope for your future. I'm sure of it.

You are in my heart and prayers every day.

With Christ's love,

Dr. Tim

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