

| **Philippians** |
Week 3 Scripture Guide | Philippians 1:19-26

Biblical Context

Paul continues his Godward perspective of his current situation. First he went at length about how God was at work in the lives of the Philippian church (1:6), then he discussed how God was on the move in his current imprisonment leading to guards coming to know Jesus and local believers being more empowered to share the gospel (1:12-18). In this next section we see Paul having this same outlook on his future in three different respects. One, is his future freedom (v.19). Two, is his future eternity (vv.20-21). And three, is his future ministry (vv.22-26).

v.19 The first section to examine is his future freedom. At first glance it appears Paul is hopeful that he will get out of prison but there is some debate on this with the word “deliverance” in v.19 (σωτηρίαν). This word is the same word used for salvation, and because of that, some believe that Paul’s deliverance is not so much in regards to imprisonment but to his ultimate salvation when he gets to be with the Lord. The two most compelling reasons for this view is (1) when looking at what immediately follows in vv.20-21, this is certainly what Paul has in mind: ultimate deliverance upon death and (2) Paul *could* be connecting the promise he offers the Philippian church in 1:6 to himself in v.19. So between these two views, freedom from prison or ultimate salvation, what exactly does Paul mean by deliverance? Scholars are split on this and it could very well be Paul has both concepts in mind. One such piece to this puzzle is that the clause in v.19, “it will turn out for my deliverance,” is actually a direct quote from the Septuagint version of Job 13:16.¹ With this in mind, Paul sees his life and circumstances as analogous to the life and circumstances of Job. Like Job, Paul is in the right and God will ultimately vindicate/deliver him - both eternally in a salvific sense and presently in his imprisonment.

Before moving on from this verse, there’s an interesting point to be made on prayer from v.19: it’s important to note the means by which Paul will be delivered/saved/vindicated. According to v.19 it will happen through both the prayers of the Philippian church *and* the Holy Spirit. Both are working together. Paul’s theology informs him that the Spirit’s work is contingent on the work of the people and whether or not they will pray.

vv. 20-21 Next we move on to Paul’s future destiny and this is yet another reason he is moved to rejoicing in his imprisonment. No matter the outcome, Jesus will be made known - whether that’s seeing Him face-to-face through death or through further ministry and gospel advancement. Both are a win. Once again we see this theme repeated: God cannot be stopped. And because His kingdom will advance, and His promises will be fulfilled, Paul’s confidence is grounded in what comes after death. When death comes for Paul he will get to be with Jesus, free from all sin, suffering, and pain and that is far, far better.²

¹ The Septuagint, most commonly abbreviated as LXX, is the Greek translation of the Old Testament that was circulated and read by most Jews at the time of Jesus and the early church

² This verse is brought up when asking - what happens after death? For an in-depth look at this and the two predominant evangelical views, see the essay, “Death and the Afterlife” by Paul Williamson on *The Gospel Coalition*. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/death-and-the-afterlife/>

vv.22-26 Lastly we move on to Paul's future ministry. Because he is hopeful of his future release in v.19, he's already looking forward to getting out of prison to once again plant churches, train up leaders, and encourage the Philippian church among others. So did this actually happen? Was Paul actually released from this imprisonment? At best we can infer that he did, though there is debate on this. To cite one commentator, "Statements in the later Pastoral Epistles as well as in the writings of some of the early church fathers indicate that Nero released Paul from his first Roman imprisonment in A.D. 62. The apostle resumed his missionary labors and returned to Macedonia and probably to Philippi. However, the Romans arrested him again, imprisoned him in Rome a second time, and then executed him as a martyr there in A.D. 68. If this information is true, he probably did contribute to the spiritual progress and joy of the Philippians as he said he hoped he could here."³

Connection and Application

Paul's confidence in this section is grounded not just in a present reality but a future reality. Because Christ has conquered death, and Paul is now in Christ, he knows that death has no hold on him.⁴ This echoes elsewhere in Paul's corpus in Romans 8:38-39, "For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Two immediate application points of our future hope, one pastoral and one missional. (1) For the Christian, this life is the closest to Hell he/she will ever get. This life, though filled with joy and good gifts, is nothing compared to what's in store after death. Likewise, this life, though filled with heartache, pain, disease, and loss will all one day be a thing of the past when we are swept up in the glory and love of God for eternity. (2) Because we know our future is locked-in, this empowers the Christian to use everything they have in this life to make much of Jesus now. Knowing our future is secure moves us not to waste our lives on trivial matters, but to invest in the stuff of eternity. We give our finances to the mission of God knowing that we can't take our stuff with us (Matt 6:19-21). We seek unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ knowing we will spend eternity with them one day (Matt 18:21-35, Rev 7:9-10, Rev 21-22). And as this passage shows us, we tell others about Jesus knowing that the worst someone can do to us (death) actually works out to our advantage. As missionary Jim Elliot said for those in Christ, "*we are indestructible until our work on earth is done.*"⁵

³ Dr. Thomas Constable, NET Bible Commentary. <https://netbible.org/bible/Philippians+1>

⁴ "Paul's hope for the future, centered as it was in Jesus, kept him from making too much of his current circumstances. This hope enabled him to reassess his circumstances, not by suppressing his emotions, evident throughout this letter, but by relating them to God's sovereignty and to Jesus' centrality in life." Darrell L. Bock, "A Theology of Paul's Prison Epistles," in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, p. 322.

⁵ J.D. Greear, "You Are Indestructible Until Your Work is Done," <https://jdgreear.com/indestructible-work-done/>