

The Lakeview Lamp

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." - Psalm 119:105

July 3, 2005

Better With Christ

Joe Fitch

"For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain ... yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you" (Phil. 1:21-). Paul faced death – as he had for much of his ministry for the Lord. It was nothing new. His life on earth was hard – often painful – sometimes filled with fear. On one occasion he recalled: *"I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling"* (1Cor. 2:3). Surely dying was not pleasant, but he was comforted – even attracted by the prospect of being *"with Christ."* He proclaimed this prospect *"far better"* than any earthly prospect.

Paul was not unique in facing death – both frequently and very closely. The disciples warned Jesus *"Rabbi, lately the Jews have sought to stone you, are you going there again?"* Jesus would not be dissuaded, and Thomas bravely said: *"Let us also go, that we may die with him"* (Jno. 11:7-). Even then, they understood that being *with Christ* far overshadowed the dread of dying – no pessimism, no despair, just reality. Paul faced death, and declared he was *"...well pleased to be absent from the body and present with the Lord"* (2 Cor. 5:8). Maybe he also learned from *"a voice from heaven saying ...Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on ...that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them"* (Rev. 14:13). All said and done, dying *with Christ* is better – far, far better.

But what if you do not die – at least not right away? Then what? Is *with Christ* only about dying? What about living? *"If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's"* (Rom. 14:8-). If there were no dying, no resurrection, no heaven or hell, living *with Christ* would still be better. Living *with Christ* is the ideal life. It makes you a better person – makes it easier for you to live with yourself – makes you a blessing to others – and makes you God's special inheritance (Eph. 1:18).

Living *with Christ* is the essence of God's plan. *"For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him"* (1 Thes. 5:9-). From the onset of our service to the Lord – from our burial *"with Him through baptism into death"* – we have been called to live *with Christ*, to *"walk in newness of life"* (Rom. 6:4). Beyond any doubt, when it comes to living, *with Christ* is better – far, far better.

We prepare to live devoutly and comfortably *with Christ*, but what if suffering appears in our forecast? First of all, there is more than one consideration about suffering – more than one basis for suffering. Peter warned, *"Let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters"* (1Pet. 4:15). Suffering for sin – for being any kind of *"evildoer"* – has no benefit. Justice is done; that is the only good thing to come out of such suffering. *"For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently?"* (1 Pet. 2:20). There is no great benefit in how you behave while you suffer -- if your suffering is for evil. You just get what you deserve. The thief on his cross knew his grievous suffering was *only* because of what he had done – we *"are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds"* (Lk. 23:40-). Neither should we find comfort in suffering

for our rudeness, for meanness, for lying about people, for *any* of our sins. However, when we “*do good and suffer for it*” (**1 Pet. 2:20**), it is an absolutely different situation. In such cases, we follow the example of Jesus (:21) and “*take it patiently.*” Now, that is “*commendable before God*” (:20). Do not miss the point! It is surely “*better ...to suffer for doing good than for doing evil*” (**3:17**) – to suffer as a Christian than as an evildoer (**4:16**). It may be that to us “*has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for his sake*” (**Phil. 1:29**) – to be “*reproached for the name of Christ*” (**4:14**). That is more than alright! “*...if indeed we suffer with him,...we may also be glorified together*” (**Rom. 8:17**). Suffering *with Christ* is better – far, far better!

Did you notice the future prospect *with Christ* ? It is “*glorified together*” (**Rom. 8:17**). In obeying the gospel, we become “*sons of God*” (:14; **Heb.2:9-14**) *together with Christ*. That means we are “*heirs of God and joint heirs*” *together with Christ* – which then means being “*glorified with him.*” If only faintly, we imagine what “*glorified with him*” implies, we will surely count as trivial any hardship encountered in being *with Him*. When all is wrapped up, when the final page is turned, “*with Christ*” is surely better – far, far better.

“O God, restore us and cause Your face to shine upon us, and we will be saved.”
– **Psalm 80:3**

Family News

Hilda Barker, Sandy Heyboer's mother, had knee surgery two weeks ago. She had therapy this past week and will complete therapy this week. She remains at home and is doing very well.

Mary Burnett has a regular doctor's appointment on Thursday.

Remember **Quinton Coppage**. He remains about the same.

There is a new report from **Arrigo Corazza** in the back of the auditorium.

Remember **Metty Fain**.

Nell Ferrell remains at NHC in room # 202 (it is better to send cards and notes of encouragement to her home address and **Elmo** will take them to her). She has an infection that they are currently treating (she finishes the medicine tomorrow). She has some fairly good days and some bad days.

Sandra Hunt has high blood pressure, PMR and foot/ankle problems. Her blood pressure medicine was doubled last month. They are still waiting (and will be for a little while) to see how effective this will be.

Alvin "John" Jenkins, Robert's father, has lung cancer. He is about the same.

Remember **Debbie Kelley** who remains at Brandywood in Gallatin. She is ready to leave Brandywood as soon as she finds a place to live.

Mildred Lancaster got sick recently because of the heat. She returns to the doctor on Tuesday for her high blood pressure.

Allen Malone returned home from Vietnam this past week. Remember the Christians there while he is here.

Remember **Laura Reed**.

Remember **Georgia Taylor**. She remains about the same.

Remember **Joyce Werner** who has very high blood pressure and many other health problems.

Ame White returned to the doctor this past Thursday. They have reached the conclusion that there is nothing more they can do to help control her pain. They hope that someday a better medicine may be developed.

Robert Wray is about the same (he still has dizzy spells).

Out of town, traveling, or visiting: **Robert & Candy Jenkins; Nicholsons** (except Troy); **Joyce Werner**

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"Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks" (1 Thes 5:16-18).