

Our Great Future Keeps Us In Present Trials

*"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.
If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me.
Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two:
I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far..."*

Philippians 1:21-23 NIV

recall studying Philippians seriously for the first time. The teacher was trying to make Paul's statement "...to die is gain.", more emphatic. So he said that what Paul was really trying to say was, "For me to live is Christ and to die is more Christ." Indeed all that death can do to the Christian is give that person vastly more of Christ than can ever be had in this life.

Death then is an enemy as it separates our soul from our body—but that is its worst blow. The other thing death does is to give us the greatest blessing possible. So this enemy the Bible calls death is a blessing in disguise.

Samuel Rutherford was a great Scottish theologian and preacher in the 1600's. Rutherford had a great deal to say about heaven and its worth. For his efforts he was persecuted by the authorities. Near the end of his life he was issued a summons to appear before parliament to answer the charges against him for preaching the Gospel. Let me quote a historian:

"in 1660 he was again subjected to bitter and persistent persecution, which ended with his being summoned to appear before the next Parliament on the charge of High Treason. But the summons found him ill and [about] to die, and the court preparing to try him, received the treasured and characteristic answer: "I am summoned before a superior court and judiciary; and I feel it suitable to answer my first summons and ere your day arrive, I will be where few kings and great folks come".

Anne Ross Cousins, a 19th century poet, took the imagery of Rutherford and composed a 20+ verse poem that has been turned into a hymn. Some of the lines are as follows:

I have borne scorn
and hatred,
I have borne wrong
and shame,
Earth's proud ones
have reproach'd me
For Christ's
thrice-blessed name:-
Where God His seal set fairest

They've stamp't
their foulest brand,
But judgment shines
like noonday,
In Immanuel's land.

They've summoned me
before them,
But there I may not come, -
My Lord says
"Come up hither",
My Lord says
"Welcome home!"
My kingly King,
at His [great] throne,
My presence doth command,
Where glory-glory dwelleth
In Immanuel's land.

May you, like the great apostle, like the saints of all ages, find such blessing in meditating on your great and eternal future that you find yourself strangely blessed and calm in present adversity. Spend time today reading about your certain and glorious inheritance in Christ (e.g. Revelation 21 & 22) until your present suffering seems unworthy of comparison with that which shall be yours forever in heaven.

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