

31. October 2020

“The right choice of the Apostle”

Phil 1:18-25

But what does it matter? Only that in both ways, whether with false motives or true, Christ is proclaimed, and for that I am happy; and I shall go on being happy, too, because I know that this is what will save me, with your prayers and with the support of the Spirit of Jesus Christ; all in accordance with my most confident hope and trust that I shall never have to admit defeat, but with complete fearlessness I shall go on, so that now, as always, Christ will be glorified in my body, whether by my life or my death. Life to me, of course, is Christ, but then death would be a positive gain. On the other hand again, if to be alive in the body gives me an opportunity for fruitful work, I do not know which I should choose. I am caught in this dilemma: I want to be gone and to be with Christ, and this is by far the stronger desire- and yet for your sake to stay alive in this body is a more urgent need. This much I know for certain, that I shall stay and stand by you all, to encourage your advance and your joy in the faith, so that my return to be among you may increase to overflowing your pride in Jesus Christ on my account.

We can well feel the fire that burns in the apostle Paul! All personal interests have withdrawn and he burns that the name of his Lord may be proclaimed! In doing so, he accepts that the intentions of those who do so are unfair and that they still have their own interests at stake! But Paul trusts that the Lord can still reach people also under such circumstances! This may comfort us when we often still perceive human imperfections when the Lord is proclaimed, although this does not apply to the proclamation of false doctrines!

In the Apostle to the Nations we recognise a man who is fully at the service of the task entrusted to him and who is focused on the goal! The mission entrusted to him penetrates him completely, it is his first and last thought, it encompasses life and death! What does this mission serve? How can it reach people? Which is better: that the apostle may set out for home to his Lord or continue to be at the service of proclaiming the Gospel on earth?

For the sake of proclaiming the Gospel, Paul puts his personal longing aside! He realises that it is right to remain with Christians, to strengthen them, to promote

their faith! The hour of death and of his full union with Christ will come! But now is the hour of proclamation, the hour of work in the Lord's vineyard!

We too can find ourselves in a similar situation to the apostle! Our hearts are drawn to be already totally with the Lord and to leave earthly life behind us or to withdraw completely to be alone with the Lord! For us it would also be the better way! To be with the Lord! But there are people who are entrusted to us, others who are waiting for our testimony, and it is more necessary to continue this ministry than to already fully satisfy our personal longing for God! God will not only accept this sacrifice, but he will be very pleased if we put the good of others above our personal, very justified desire!

It may even be that God leaves us the choice, as was probably the case with the Apostle Paul, for in this context he does not speak of searching the will of God, for he knows himself that he was living in the will of the Lord! He considers and chooses for all of us, because we too have benefited greatly from the words and deeds of the Apostle to the Nations!

What is essential for us is that a fire also burns within us to love the Lord above all else, to bear witness to the love of our Father, and that we fully comply with this task - within the life situation into which the Lord has called us or even when he calls us out for special service! We can ask for this fire, and let us take care, as it says in a beautiful church prayer, that it is not extinguished by any temptation!