

# Alive to God in Christ

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Preacher: Rev. Clive Jennings

[ 0 : 00 ] Morning everyone. Question is, what difference does it make to our lives to be a follower of Christ?

What difference does it make? What is distinctive about our Christian life that impacts on other people? When we invite others into this life-giving relationship with God through Jesus Christ, what exactly is it that we are offering them?

And do we know what we're offering them in all its fullness? These are really important questions as we ask ourselves what it means day by day, week by week, to be followers of Christ.

What does it actually mean to us? And if we don't know what difference the Christian life makes, then how can we invite people into that relationship that we know so well with integrity and with confidence?

The last thing we want to invite people into is a church that just offers good social events, nice coffee, a very warm, fuzzy feeling.

[ 1 : 08 ] That's very nice and it's good to have relationship. But the relationship that Paul is talking about this morning and that we offer is far, far, far, far more than a cozy club to which we welcome people and abide with.

Yes, friendship and deepening relationships are important, but a relationship with Jesus is imperative. We've just finished a group called Any Questions, which was great.

Six people came along who had no or very little connection with church at all. It was great. All the questions you have ever wanted to ask and most of them were asked.

And it was brilliant. We had a great time. And it's about sharing and living the good news as we as people of God are alive in Christ and not dead to sin.

That's what we're talking about today. And as I was preparing for this morning, I thought, where is one of the toughest places to actually share your faith openly, to put it on the line?

[ 2 : 15 ] And I thought of street pastors and street preachers. What a great place to get out there into the community and talk about your faith openly to people so that they can respond.

I came across this clip and it's a street preacher on the Broadmead in Bristol. And if you know the Broadmead in Bristol, it's made up of quite a variety of different people who I'm sure have all got their different views.

And in this clip, for 40 minutes, this street preacher is bombarded with all sorts of questions from a man who really, truly believed that we came from monkeys.

And another guy who just thinks that we were all here because a meteor hit there and we all became a part of that. But throughout, if you watch this, in the background, as I noticed, there were four young people.

There was a young woman and four guys that were with her. And they didn't move. 40 minutes, they were listening and taking in the message that the street preacher was giving about this thing about being alive in Christ.

[ 3 : 35 ] What a great thing. This thing that we're talking about that Paul knew, that Paul is sharing, is what did he offer that day these people?

He offered new life in Christ. A new life that had begun. And the idea of the old self dying and being born into a new life in Christ. So let's unpack this passage that Paul said then, which was so fresh to us today.

It makes, it is the same. The first thing is to say that we are joining Paul halfway through a conversation that he's having. And the conversation is, in the first five chapters to the letter of the Romans, Paul has been laying out the theological understanding of where he is and where he comes from with the gospel.

And that's why he begins with this slightly strange question in verse one, where he says, what then shall we say? What then should we say?

Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? Should we continue in that way or not? And over the last few chapters, Paul has been outlining to them the immensity of God's love and what that means and what they've seen in Paul as he's practiced that.

[ 4 : 51 ] As Martin said, you know, Paul was a worker. Paul was a tent maker. He was there carrying on his work around people while he was talking about his faith. Like we do, I hope, in the everyday.

And so he raises this question, which may have been in the mind of some of his hearers and, to be honest, may reflect some of our own thoughts at times about this thing about sin.

So, well, I know I shouldn't really be doing this, God. But I know that you're going to forgive me, so it'll be okay. Yeah? Come on, be honest.

You know, I'll do this stuff, but I know I'm okay because you're going to forgive me. Well, of course, none of us would ever actually say that, would we? But, of course, it goes on a little bit in our minds occasionally.

And here Paul names the elephant in the room. Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? Should we continue in that sin?

[ 5 : 57 ] And not surprisingly, Paul straight away says, no way. No, not at all. And he said, by no means. But increasingly, the reason he gives for us not to behave like that isn't some sort of moral argument at all.

No, he doesn't say that it's a bad attitude to have. Instead, he holds this deeply, deeply theological view that it is actually impossible for us to carry on this Christian life if we are actually living in another place in sin.

In verse 2, he asked the rhetorical question, what can he who died to sin, who can we who died to sin go on living in it? And you, as well as I do, know that when we're in sin, it's not a good place to be.

It doesn't feel good. It doesn't feel right. We know in ourselves we don't feel comfortable in that place. And if we're not feeling comfortable in that place, well, maybe there is something that we need to do about it.

How can we who died to sin go on living in it? Now, this seems an odd thing to say, because all of us continue to sin. And we do, day by day.

[ 7 : 10 ] So what is Paul talking about? Commentators on this passage are really helpful. How can he who died to sin go on living in it?

What he means is that when we give our life to Jesus, and we begin to live in the grace of the Father, then sin no longer has any ultimate power over us.

No power at all. Sin doesn't define our life. It doesn't stick. It doesn't diminish us. It doesn't take us away from the fullness of who we should be, the power of God living in our lives.

It is far, far greater that God's power in our life is far greater than any sin that will hold us. Why? Because a transaction has occurred.

This is what Paul's talking about this morning. There has been a change, a significant change.

Once we were dead to God, living under the power of sin, but now we are dead to the power of sin and living under the power of God.

[ 8 : 16 ] There has been a reversal of our fortunes, a total reversal. Life has come, new life in all its fullness, and that's what we live in.

Hallelujah, I hear you say. And the more we acknowledge and we set that, the more we allow that to become a reality in our lives, that we are of Christ.

And the more ridiculous the idea in verse 1 becomes, that we no longer want to treat God's grace like some common cheap commodity, that we can do things wrong with impunity, just knowing that we'll be forgiven.

We wouldn't want to do that, would we? I mean, who would do that? I dare not say we wouldn't maybe do that intentionally, but it doesn't feel good. None of us would want, along with the ones that we love, no basis maybe for a happy marriage or a relationship.

So why should it be the basis of our relationship with God? To do one thing and then to do another. It just doesn't work like that. In this transaction, the reality of our lives are now different because we live as Christians.

[ 9 : 26 ] We live this Christian life so that everybody knows, and we know exactly where we are in this relationship with God. Now that the old life has died and the new risen life is with us.

Quite simply, through our union with Jesus Christ and what he has done for us on the cross, it is that clear. That's what Paul is telling people. And as Paul goes on to say in 3 and 4, do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised into his death?

Therefore, we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Here is the transaction in practice. This is what the baptism was all about. This is what our baptism was all about. If you haven't been baptised, please come and talk to us.

We'd love to get the tub out and baptise you. We have become united to Christ. And his death becomes our death. And his new life becomes our new life.

[ 10 : 40 ] Do you feel like a people who have new life? I hope so. It is nothing we have earned or achieved ourselves. Jesus has done it for us.

If we unite ourselves to him, then his death becomes ours, and his resurrection life becomes ours too. We know the cost and we live in that cost.

The resurrection life isn't just something that will happen to us on the last day when Jesus comes again. No, not at all. The resurrection life is what you and I walk in every moment of every day.

Please hear that. That's the life that we walk in every day. As Paul writes elsewhere in 2 Corinthians, we are always carrying in our body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our bodies.

The people will see in us and through us that life that he brings. And in our daily lives, we carry in our bodies both the death and resurrection of Jesus, but the old is gone and the new has come.

[ 11 : 53 ] So our moral conduct, our character, the way we behave, the way we seek, and the way we interact with our Lord Jesus Christ is life-giving, not just for ourselves, but the community that we've been called to serve.

Now this is a really important verse. And the body, as Paul says in verse 6, we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed and we might no longer be enslaved to sin.

Really important. Like with the word sin, there are two different meanings to the word body when Paul uses it. The first is the physical body, but the second is that thing that we bring in our social relationship, our character.

very much our character. So when Paul says that the body of sin is destroyed, he means that as we as Christians, we have a new way of relating to the world, a new way of relating to people.

People see in us something different, something that they want. Like the two guys on the broad beat, they saw something that they wanted in that point and came to know Jesus.

[ 13 : 07 ] Fundamentally, the old has gone, and the new has come. And the result is that we now relate to the world differently. We relate to one another differently. We have love, we have grace, we have understanding, we have compassion.

All those things that we saw in Jesus is given to us to share with the world in the power of the Holy Spirit. We relate to our community of Clevedon differently.

And as he goes on to say in verse 7 and 8, for whoever has died is freed from sin. But if I have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

We live in that resurrection life. So what does it mean for us to live with Christ in relation to our social context today?

What does that actually mean for us as we go out, our world, our wider community? It means that we must always be governed by the same principles that govern Jesus in his interaction with his own social context.

[ 14 : 07 ] What does that mean? Like Jesus, we are to be motivated by kindness. Like Jesus, we are to be motivated by hospitality and generosity and a welcome to others.

Like him, we are to be motivated by that love and compassion. Like him, we are to move in the power of the Holy Spirit. Like him, we are to be courageous and bold like the guy who was street preaching.

My hands sweat when I think I may actually be called to that. What a great gift. But maybe your hands sweat too when you are actually called to witness for Christ in the everyday.

Come on, Lord, give me the words. Give me the power. Pray to bring others into a relationship with you. I guess that's what resonated with those young people on the street.

And as individuals and as church corporately, the body of sin has been destroyed. Let's really be clear about that because we now belong to Christ.

[15:09] And as Paul says in verse 8, but if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. Have we died with Christ to the things in our sin?

Have we died with Christ as individuals? Have we died with Christ as a Christian community? And if we have, then the old is gone and the new is here.

And we should be truly alive in him. Are you with me? So far? Well done. And once we grasp that, once we truly grasp the truth of what a mission-shaped church looks like, of us as Christians together, there is no turning back.

Just as there was no turning back for Jesus, there was no turning back from what he did. He died and rose again. No turning back. There is no turning anything back for us in Christ.

And as Paul writes in 9 and 10, we know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again. Death no longer has dominion over him. And neither has it for us.

[16:22] That we have life in all its fullness. The death has died. He died to sin once for all. But the life he lives, he lives to God. There is no turning back.

Likewise, we as a community of Christchurch, we have died with Christ to sin and we have been raised to new life and there is no going back. Throughout the Bible, you see people who have been tempted to go back.

It was better to be brick slaves back in Egypt than to carry on and go with God. And so often, we are tempted, aren't we? We are tempted to go back to an old life because that was safe.

That was what we knew. That is regular. That was okay. We can carry on. But what Paul here is talking about is talking about a new life. A new life where we don't have to go back.

That sin has been dealt with. That we don't even have to go there. And in the final verse, in verse 11, he says, Paul urges us, so you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to Christ.

[17:25] So as an individual, let's acknowledge that. And when we do, how will that be reflected in your life? And I can tell you, because we've been singing about it this morning and talking about it, and as Martin Luther said in a famous speech, free at last, free at last, freedom.

And about you as a follower of Christ, as an apprentice, as a disciple, as we all are, do you sense that freedom? The old is gone, the new has come.

How do we experience that? Because so often you may be sat there thinking now, in this very place, that a word comes to you and said, I can't have that because of something I've done in the past.

The list will be there. He will come and remind you, the evil one, again and again. I can't have this fullness in Christ because of that that I did in my life.

And it may be years back and he will drag it up like a cesspit of dirt to bring it back to mind to stop you having a fullness in Christ.

[18:38] The issue is, is do you want to live with one foot in the grave? In the grave of the past? No. Paul is saying you don't have to do that because it is done once and for all and we can live the new life.

Buzz the past eight, it has been done and we live this new life in Christ. So the question I found asking myself in this morning's reading, are you dead to sin and alive to God in Christ?

It was that simple. It was that simple as I read this. Clive, are you dead to sin and alive to God in Christ? And I offer that to you this morning.

I offer it to you wherever you may be. Is there something today that is clinging to you? Preventing you from being fully alive in Christ?

Something that's been held on to, something that's stuck, something that's cleared. At this very moment, now that thought, that's saying, no, no, you can't be because of this.

[19:48] No. Something that is preventing you, a thought, a past sin, a sense of being unworthy. I'm not good enough.

Hear this. As a Christian, you are dead to sin when you give your life to Christ. You have, as Paul says, a new life.

live in it. Live in it. Live in this new life to the fullness. Nothing to hold us back.

So maybe in this series that we've been following now, at this very moment, at 11.32, on Sunday, the 9th of July at Christchurch in Clevedon, or whatever time you're listening to this on the podcast, whether you're in lane 3 of the M4 passing Swindon, wherever you might be at this time, in your home group, listening in your lunch break, is this the time when we declare that whatever is trying to bind us, hold us back from that joyous freedom, our fears, our cares, anxieties, current sin, past sin, long past sin, sense of being unworthy, we declare those things are dead.

We declare they are dead because of our new life, that we are alive to God in Christ Jesus, that we are free.

[ 21 : 32 ] to stand as one people in strength and the power of God together in repentance and joyous repentance because we are free.

Amen. Amen. So come on people, should we do that? Should we do that now together? Should we do that now as one?

I invite you, if you are able to stand, if you are able to stand, stand with me. If you are not able to stand, maybe if you agree you just maybe like to raise your hand, if you are not able to stand.

So all those, all the things that evil one wants to hold us with one foot in the grave, we now declare and celebrate that in the truth of the gospel that we have heard this morning that we are dead to sin. Should we say that together? We are dead to sin. We are dead to sin. And alive to God in Christ Jesus. And alive to God in Christ Jesus.

[ 22 : 47 ] Should we say that louder again so that the whole town can hear? We are dead to sin. And we are alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Amen. Holy Spirit, would you come now and fill us afresh in the power of the risen Jesus to live and work to your glory alive to you every minute, every day through the power and presence of Jesus Christ our Savior.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.