

For me to live is Christ

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- [0 : 00] Let us now turn to the passage that we read. Paul's letter to the Philippians in chapter 1, and reading again at verse 21.
- For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.
- Perhaps a very appropriate motto for the beginning of a new year. For me to live is Christ.
- How we live has been the subject of conflict right from the very outset of the life of man.
- In the garden, there was conflict between the supremacy of God and the supremacy of man's desires.
- [1 : 25] From the point of the temptation that was set before Adam and Eve through the serpent. And perhaps you've heard many people who decry and mock the story of Genesis 3.
- It has been a fable. How can anyone possibly believe that God would judge human beings and condemn them and curse them and punish them for merely taking the fruit from the tree that was forbidden?
- Surely it is unreasonable and unjust, even ridiculous. How can anyone believe such a thing?
- Well, of course, there's a whole lot to the story in Genesis 3 than the mere taking of the fruit of the tree that was forbidden.
- Because when you look at that story in Genesis 3, as it has been breathed out by the Spirit of God, you discover that what happened there was a rejection of the Word of God.
- [2 : 46] God had said to Adam and Eve, I made you. I've given you all things.
- I've even given you one another. I've given you all the fruit of the trees in the garden but one. And out of love for me and loyal to me, I am telling you, you may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die.
- That was the condition that was set before our first parents. And so when Eve takes and Adam eats the fruit of the tree that was forbidden, they are saying to God, in effect, we are not going to obey your Word.
- We are going to do it our way. We are going to be number one. We are going to do what we want to do.
- And so at one level, it was a fundamental rejection of the Word of God, a rebellion against His sovereign rule.
- [4 : 16] But there is more to it than that. What you have in the garden is God who has created Adam and Eve.
- Everything that they are comes from God. God has made them, in a sense, to be vice regents, to reign over creation with Him.
- In God's great mercy and kindness, He has said, you are going to be my stewards, in effect, on earth. Everything in the world is going to be given by my hand into your keeping.

You are going to rule over it. You are going to be my image, in ruling over it. And then, so that people will see what God is like, in the way that you rule creation.

Not only that, I am going to have fellowship with you. I am going to talk with you in the cool of the day. We are going to walk in the garden. We are going to speak with one another.

[5 : 36] We are going to get to know one another. And you are going to learn how much I love you. How much I want to give you. What a glorious God I am.

And all of that is given into the hands of our first parents. And then, comes the serpent. And in effect, the serpent says, God is a liar.

If you really want to have knowledge, if you really want to have power, if you really want to be free, take the fruit from the forbidden tree.

And so you find Adam and Eve faced with a choice. God or the fruit of the forbidden tree. The God who made them, the God who loves them, the God who is generous to them, who cared for them, who gave them everything that they are, are the fruit of the forbidden tree.

That's the choice. And so you see, the folly is not the judgment of God. The folly is that Adam and Eve could have even paused for even a fraction to think about their choice.

[7 : 04] And yet, that's just what they did. And the fruit wins. And that's the picture of what we do every time we allow our desires to dictate to us and take us away from God.

And you get what you want. But do not for a moment think that it equates in any way to what you lose.

that's the sad part. And maybe you're saying tonight, well, had I been in the place of our first parents, I would never have done that.

If I had been there, I would have been true to God. But my friend, you know what is true. Ten thousand times ten thousand and even more, in every day, that same story is played out in the life of man.

Where we set our desires on something other than the one true and living God as he is set before us in Christ Jesus.

[8 : 30] And what do we do? In effect, we are saying, for me to live is. now you fill in the blank. For me to live is.

Fill in the blank honestly in your own life. What is it for you to live? It's not Christ. It's something else.

And what the apostle Paul is saying in this marvelous passage is that for him to live is Christ. In other words, that Christ is first and foremost and he no desire, no wealth, no ambition, no status, no power in the world can substitute for knowing and serving and loving and enjoying fellowship and glorifying and enjoying Christ.

Christ. So the question for you and me this evening is this, how do we know we are living for Christ? And I'd like to suggest several thoughts.

And the first is this, it seems to me that those who can say for me to live is Christ, they have a desire to know so much of Christ as is humanly possible in this life.

[10 : 02] They cannot get enough of Christ. They want to know about his character. They want to know about his plans. They want to know about the persons, how the persons of the Trinity relate to him.

They want to know all about his claims, all about his powers. They want to know all about his teachings. they want to know about his works and his ways, about his character.

They want to know all about his person. They want to know about the meaning of his death, his saving, redemptive work.

And they cannot get enough. If I can illustrate it like this, you know when those of you who have married, if you fall in love with a person, you want to know the tendencies of that person.

You want to know their likes and their dislikes. You want to know the character of that person. The things that make him or her laugh or cry.

[11 : 16] You want to know the heart break of that person. You want to know about their background and where they've come from, who they are and what they are. You want to know their experience. You want to know all about him or us.

And it seems to me that is how it is for those for whom it is true that for them to live is Christ.

They want to know all about Jesus Christ because they can't get enough of Christ. Tell me more about Jesus.

Seems to me the cry of those for whom it is true for them to live is Christ. Tell me more about who he is.

Tell me more about his nature, about how he relates to the Father and to the Holy Spirit. Tell me, explain to me more how he redeemed me from where I was.

[12 : 26] Tell me what his sufferings on the cross meant, what it accomplished, what his death did. Preach about that over and over and over. Tell me everything in his word that you can tell me about Jesus because that's what I'm here for.

For me to live is Christ. Oh, my friend, is that true of you tonight that you can't get enough, that you never tire of hearing about the gospel, that you never tire about hearing about Jesus Christ, that there is a constant thirst and hunger in your soul to hear about Christ.

Well, that's the first thought I'd like to suggest. The second is this, that those of whom this is true for me to live is Christ, seems to me not only can they not get enough of Christ, but they want to be like Christ.

You see, they're not just satisfied with knowing it. They're not satisfied with, as it were, standing back and admiring Christ as he is portrayed in scripture.

They want to be conformed in their own life to his image. They want to think like he thinks. They want to believe like he believes.

[14 : 08] They want to hate like he hates. They want to love what he loves. They want to do what he does. They want their life goal to be his life goal.

You know, if you have friends, and their life is such a source of inspiration and encouragement to you, and often you think like this, I wish I could be like that person.

I wish I could be just like them. I wish I could be him or I wish I could be her. Have you ever thought like that?

Have there been those who made such an indelible impression upon your own life that that thought has cropped up again and again, I wish I could just be that person.

what God has done in their life is such an encouragement to me. And it motivates you to want to be like that.

[15 : 20] Well, surely that's what it's like to be in the fellowship of the Lord Jesus Christ. You're indebted to him for the full and the free pardon.

that he has purchased for you. And you thank him for what he did because you know and you have learned that it's not based on anything that you have done or would do ever.

It's based on the gift of free grace. Oh, wouldn't you like it? in an unconverted state if you could say, yes, I earned salvation.

Yes, I did this, that, or the next thing, or I didn't do this, that, or the next thing, and that's why he came into my life. Uh-uh. That's not why he came into your life.

He came on account of his rich and free grace. There was not one thing in you or me that deserved that Christ would come.

[16 : 40] And so you're pleading, I want to be like you. Mold me, make me, fill me, change me, so that on the great last day when you stand before God, that you will be clothed in that clothing that will leave you spotless in the presence of the Almighty.

Oh, my friend, do you desire that in the presence of Christ tonight to be in his presence so that you will be accepted not because you deserved it, not because you earned it, not because you did anything before or after your conversion that fitted your life or that fitted you for life with God in heaven.

It's all his work. It's not difficult for a people who were born with a principle innate in their nature do this and live.

Difficult for you to accept that when you stand there spotless before the throne it's not because there was something you did that equipped you and brought you there.

there. And when you stand there should you be privileged to be amongst them. You'll see an innumerable number.

[18 : 42] And you know what? They'll all be like Jesus. They believe like him. They think like him.

They love like him. They act like him. they love what he loves. And he has accepted them not because many of those things but because this was a gift from the father to the son in the will of God.

And yet they have been transformed in their character so that they've become like Jesus who is the image of the living God.

And that's the second thought I'd like to leave with you. Not only do they want to know Christ but they want to be like Christ. Christ. The third thought I'd like to suggest to you with regard to those whom it is true for me to live is Christ that they want to make this Christ known to their fellow men in the world.

You remember the apostle Paul thought that God's purpose for human life was to stamp out the name of Christ to crush this new form of religion of Christianity to jail to kill as many Christians as possible.

[20 : 33] and he thought that the one true God would take huge delight in this. And then one day the Lord Jesus met him when he was behaving like a wild beast as the book of Acts tells us on the road to Damascus and changed his life and turned him into for want of a better phrase into a dynamic missionary.

a fervent evangelist, a loving pastor, and a great theologian.

And when he did, because Paul came to understand the greatness of Christ in that encounter that he had face to face with the risen Lord, what effect did it have?

the effect was this. He wanted everyone else to know about the greatness of Christ, and he was prepared to cross land and sea so that others might experience the grace and the greatness of Christ in the way that he had experienced.

Is that not the way? for those who have been born again and quickened by the power of God's Holy Spirit, do you not want others to share in the good news?

[22 : 08] Do you not want others to share in the Christ who has come to me so much for you? you who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, do you not want a number that no man can number out of every tongue and tribe from around the world to come into the enjoyment of the goodness and the greatness and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Is that not why you pray? Is that not why you give support to mission work in the world?

Because you want others to hear about the good news in Christ Jesus? Is that not why you are prepared to go out personally into your neighborhood and tell what Christ has done for your soul?

Why do you want to do that? Because to live is Christ. And it's a truth that you cannot keep to yourself. You cannot keep it.

You want to share it. To live is Christ. To make his name known as far as possible.

[23 : 49] That's why we give out tracts and Bibles. That's why we send missionaries to other parts of the world. That's why we welcome them.

That's why we do evangelism. All of these things because to live is Christ. Christ. So that's the third thought I'd like to leave with you.

To know him. To be like him. To spread the news. And the last thought I'd leave is this.

To enjoy Christ. To find happiness in fellowship and communion with him.

In other words, Christ is first in your life. It's not that we don't enjoy many of the good things. Or all of the good things that God gives us in this life.

[24 : 50] But even when you're enjoying these good things, you know them that you have them only because of Jesus Christ. How many times have you heard people praying or saying grace on these words, for the sake of Jesus Christ.

For the sake of Jesus Christ. Oh, how indebted we are to Jesus Christ. The many good things that we enjoy for the sake of Jesus Christ.

And you appreciate that the enjoyment would be lost. And their taste would become tasteless were it not for the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

They come from a great giver, from a generous giver. And they would mean nothing apart from Jesus Christ.

It is said of Samuel Rutherford that if his Lord were not in heaven, he wouldn't want to be there.

[26 : 16] Give him all the benefits of glory and take away Christ. And he says, I wouldn't want to be there because my first and central joy and delight in this life is Christ.

That's who I want above everything else. Here was a man who could say for me to live his Christ.

Now, that means that there are other things in life that perhaps are attractive to you. But you are prepared to forgo these attractions or these pleasures because they are inconsistent with Jesus Christ.

Things that you will give up that you rightly enjoy because you want other people to know Jesus Christ.

Is that not true as well? Not just that there are things that you enjoy for the sake of Christ, but there are things that you are prepared to forego for the sake of Christ too.

[27 : 26] That's what it means to live Christ. Christ. And if we live Christ, then we can have huge comfort when we come to a moment which will be inevitably in all of our lives if Christ doesn't come first.

And that is the moment of our death. death. And it is for these very people for whom it is true to live is Christ.

For them to die is gain. I think it's Thomas Boston who made the comment the believer's life is so different from the unbeliever's life.

So the believer's death is different from the unbeliever's death. For the unbeliever death is a loss. The greatest loss.

And just a day or two ago I was reading of a young woman who died. I think she was in Wales. And she wrote, prior to her death, life is fragile, precious, unpredictable, and each day is a gift, not a given right.

[28 : 51] The days tick by, she wrote, and you just expect they will keep on coming until the unexpected happens. I'm 27. Now, I don't want to go.

I love my life. But you see, it wasn't in her hands. God's love. When God appoints that day, we have to go, whether we want to go or not.

And I don't know if that lady was a believer or an unbeliever. I don't know anything about her. But I want to tell you about a believer, because I got a card in a parcel on the 29th of December.

The afternoon of the 29th of December. And amongst the things that were written on the card was this, Christ is risen, and to be with him is better.

The person who wrote these words died early on the 2nd of January of 2018. You see, for the believer, death is the greatest gain.

[30 : 09] How can that be true? What makes death a gain? When people look upon death as a tremendous loss, the greatest loss that they can ever suffer, how can it be a gain?

And you notice what the apostle is saying here. He is not saying that death is gain for everyone. It is gain for those for whom to live is Christ.

You see, yes, we experience loss. When those we love in life are taken from us, and we mourn, and we mourn rightly when they are taken from us.

And what the apostle is saying here, despite, despite the grief and the mourning that may be in our lives, yet for the believer, death is the greatest gain.

And how can he say that? Well, I want to set a few thoughts before you. Why? Paul is saying that it is gain. And perhaps these thoughts, for those of you who know the Shorter Catechism, are summarized in the Shorter Catechism.

[31 : 40] What benefits, the Shorter Catechism asks, do believers receive from Christ a death? And you remember the answer that is given, and there are four points made in that answer.

The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness. That's the first comfort. And the second comfort is this, and do immediately pass into glory.

And the third one is, their bodies are still united to Christ. And the fourth is this, being still united to Christ, they do rest in their graves until the resurrection.

So the Catechism, the Shorter Catechism, outlines for us what Paul is setting before us in this letter with regard to the gain that belongs to those of whom it is true for me to live is Christ.

To die is gain. What kind of gain? Well, look at verse 23. What does Paul say? To depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

[32 : 57] That was what my late friend was looking to. I believe when he wrote the words on that card. He was looking to be with Christ.

He was near the end of life's journey. less than a week or within the week from when he wrote the card he had passed into the eternal realm.

The gain is to be with Christ. That's where the blessing that enables the believer to say that death is gain.

because in death believers are with Christ, whom they value above all things. And for them, therefore, death is gain.

The greatest gain. In death they are united inseparably with Christ.

[34 : 08] They are brought into eternal fellowship with him. You remember how the apostle expresses it in writing to the Corinthians in the second letter to the Corinthians. I prefer, he says, as it is translated in the ESV, I would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

That's the primary longing of the apostle, to be with Christ, to enjoy unbroken fellowship with Christ, because he valued Christ more than anything else.

And that longing is instantaneously fulfilled in death. There is immediate unbroken fellowship with Christ.

So first thought, why it is gain. The second one is this, they are made perfect in holiness. holiness. They are made perfect in holiness.

Now here is a man who knew what it was to wrestle with the reality of total depravity. He knew what it was to wrestle with the power of indwelling sin.

[35 : 26] Paul knew what it was to wrestle with the power of indwelling sin. You remember how you have that cry that comes out from his inner being, wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?

Well he answers the question here in verse 20 of the chapter we read, I will not at all, I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always, Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.

Paul knew that in death, Christ was going to be exalted in his perfecting of the apostle Paul. So that the apostle Paul would never know again the anguish of the wrestling with the power of indwelling sin, that he would never know again the power of sin, distracting his thoughts, taking his focus away from Christ.

That's why Paul is able to say, thanks be to God through Jesus Christ, our Lord. He would be made perfect.

I want to ask you a question here. Are you always aware of your sin? sin? Do you think that you always feel the power of sin in your life and its effects?

[37 : 15] Well, let me put it another way. Have you ever deeply hurt or wounded or betrayed or let down someone whom you deeply love?

have you cut them to the quick? You've done it. No one else but you. And if you've lived very long, you will know that it is by your own actions that you did it.

Whether there were thoughts or words or deeds, hurting the ones you love the most. And perhaps were you always aware of it?

No, be honest in your response. Were you always aware of it? Well, you see, when you are made perfect in holiness, you'll never do that again.

You'll never do it again. in the hour of death, Paul is saying, never again, your heart will never wander from your Lord.

[38 : 34] You'll never yield to the temptation of Satan. You'll never hurt the ones you care most about. Oh, there is glorious rest for those who are made perfect in holiness.

That's another reason I believe why death is gay. There's another reason I'd like to raise for the time brought to a conclusion.

For those of whom it is true to live is Christ and to die is gain, it is gain because they pass into glory. notice what Paul says in verse 23.

He's hard pressed from both directions. He has a desire to depart and to be with Christ. Why? Because he says, that is far better.

Why is it far better? Because when a believer passes through death, he passes into a or she passes into a place of glory, into a company of glory, into a state of glory.

- [40 : 03] You see, death doesn't have the last say. Remember what Jesus says when he's speaking words of comfort to his distraught and deeply troubled disciples.
- You remember how he comforted them? In my father's house are many bones. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you.
- It's a glorious place, filled with a glorious company. There are all the saints including those who have gone before and with whom you may be awaiting a reunion.
- But above all, Christ is there. That's the attraction. Christ is there. Oh, think of it.
- You have perhaps served him for many years. From the time that you were given liberty. From the time that salvation entered into your experience.
- [41 : 23] But you've never seen him with your physical eye. Oh, yes, you've seen him through faith. But you've never seen him face to face.
- Oh, but when you pass into glory, you will see him as he really is. And you will be like him.
- Here we are in a world where everyone is always busy. It's never time for anything. time. But there in glory there is everlasting rest.
- In death you begin to taste, I believe for the very first time, you begin to taste the fullness of the glory that is to come.
- that awaits the great resurrection. But in death, more than you have ever tasted it before, you will taste glory.
- [42 : 40] You know, even in life, from time to time, there are fleeting moments when you feel perhaps you are within touching distance of heaven.
- Or if I can put it another way, when you are, as it were, perhaps, just in the suburbs of glory itself. Perhaps, perhaps, in a moment when God drew near to you, and his nearness was so real to you, there was such a sense of forgiveness and peace and glory around you.
- May have been in a sermon may have been in the context of the funeral of a loved one.
- It may have been in some private devotion. And the presence of the Lord was so great and so real to you and so real. And it's as if you were in the very suburbs of heaven and you were saying, I wish this moment would last.
- I wish it wouldn't end. But you know, death is gain for the believer because when you are ushered into it, it's going to last.
- [44 : 08] It won't end. Oh, the wish that you had in these moments of fellowship with him, when you were transported as it were, above, above the things of life and all around it.
- And you were saying, I wish it wouldn't end. Oh, my friend, then, it will not end. And my final thought is this, with regard to death being gained.
- You are united to Christ. You are united to him through faith in his name. faith in but there is a peculiar sense in which to depart and be with Christ, that your bodies are still united to Christ and your soul is feasting on rich and deep fellowship with Christ.
- Christ. Is that not the fulfillment of what the apostle Paul teaches in writing to the Romans? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ, he says, shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?
- And you remember how he responds to that series of questions and all these things. He says, we are more than conquerors through him that loved us 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.

[45 : 57] And so the apostle when he says to depart is to be with Christ when he says that to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord he is affirming what he is teaching there in Romans 8 for believers even although your body is still in the grave you are reunited to the Savior and your soul in fellowship with him well my friend as you go into this year that will have just as many surprises as many unexpected events as the years that have passed are you entering it with Christ are you prepared for that day of death may God grant that we are prepared through the gospel for that great day and that the word of God which the 119th psalm speaks so much of and the influence of the word of God that it have that molding shaping effect upon your life and mine that we too can say for me to live is Christ and to die is gain what is no dubiety about it in the mind of the apostle no doubt about the gain or the benefits that are his as one who lives Christ let us pray again to do