

To Live is Christ

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Date: 02 November 2014

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[0 : 00] Our God, we thank you for your great kindness to us in the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you that his presence in the world and in our lives changes everything.

And we pray that we might learn more of what this means today. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, friends, it has been 15 years now since the events of September the 11th, 2009. And you'll all remember what happened. I remember. I remember where I was the first time I heard the news. And some of you will remember that time as well. There were four coordinated attacks launched on the USA or within the USA.

And as the investigators began looking at the evidence, the facts became very clear. The men behind these attacks were men with a cause. They had something that they had lived and planned for over a number of years.

They had something that they were even willing to die for. And so deliberately they chose large and heavy planes. They took advantage of lax security.

[1 : 08] They armed themselves with knives and bolt cutters. And they were dedicated men, men with a cause. And they seized control of airliners. And they flew them into their targets with precision.

They were dedicated men, men who died the deaths of martyrs. The members of Al-Qaeda are not the first people in the world to die the death of martyrs. And they won't be the last. Palestinian men and women have regularly strapped bombs around their bodies to blow themselves up. ISIS fighters, even now, are willing to go to the death for their particular cause. Irish terrorists did it in the United Kingdom in the 1980s.

Communists did it during the time when they were in the ascendancy in the world. And no matter what their cause, these people made sacrifices. And they lived for a cause.

They were dedicated men and women. And many of them died in dedication to the cause, their cause. They had found something, you see, worth living and dying for.

[2 : 10] But as we travel back even further than them, we find Jesus. You see, Jesus also was a man with a cause. He had something to live for, the obedience to his father. But he also had something to die for.

And so he, who eternally lived with his father in unalloyed fellowship with him, left his father's side. And he became a human being.

The eternal son of God became one born of a woman, nursed by his mother, worked with his hands as a carpenter. He humbled himself and he lived a life of obedience to his father.

And knowing our need of salvation, he found us something to die for. And so for us, he died the most ignoble of deaths by crucifixion. You see, he too was a man with a cause and a dedicated man.

Now, each of the people that I've talked about this morning are people who have found something to live for. They are people with something they are even willing to die for.

[3 : 15] And history is filled with people like them. Some of them live and die for an ideology. Some of them live and die for another person or perhaps even another group of people. Some of them live and die for something tangible in this present life, such as money or a name or a reputation or something to hand on to their children.

And some of them live and die for something intangible that will only find a reward in some future existence or in the lives of others that they'll leave or who will follow after them. Today, we're going to look at one of those who lived as a disciple of Jesus after the death of Jesus.

We're going to look at Paul as we've been, as we started doing last week, Paul, a follower of Jesus. And we're going to listen to a private conversation, as it were, which has now become very public in

the letter of the Philippians between him and a group of Christians that had become his friends. And as we do, we're going to find that he's a person who has found something that is worth living for and dying for. And we'll discover that this something fills him with incredibly great and overwhelming joy.

And my hope is that as we hear this man talk to his friends, we will hear God speak to us about our approach to life and death and joy. So open your Bibles.

[4 : 38] 11.78 is my recollection of the page number. Philippians chapter 1 verses 12 to 26. Now, I want you to remember the context which we started last week. Paul is writing to a church that was founded in the midst of significant persecution.

This is a congregation that he feels a deep affection for. It is a congregation that feels a deep affection for him. You see, he founded the church a number of years before, and now he's in prison, and he's become aware that his friends in Philippi have become concerned for him.

But they're not only concerned about his personal situation and well-being, no, they're also concerned about the spread of the gospel, which they know for they had experienced it.

They were part of the spread of the gospel. They have been converts under Paul's ministry. And it appears that it is those issues, their fears in one sense, their concerns, that he addresses his attention to now.

Now, I'm just going to read the first section. So to remind you, Paul says, Now, I want you to know, brothers, I think he's giving them some sense of assuring them of his concern, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.

[5 : 47] As a result, it's become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I'm in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.

It's true, some preach out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so in love, knowing that I'm here for the defense of the gospel. The former, well, they preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing they can stir up trouble for me while I'm in chains.

But what does it matter? However, the important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preaching because of this. Well, I rejoice.

I want you to notice something about what Paul says in these verses. You see, in these verses, we see what makes him function as a human being and a disciple of Jesus. Look at verse 12.

Paul's focus is clear, isn't it? He's a man with a cause that is with something to live for. And the thing he lives for is the proclamation of the gospel of God's son.

[6 : 50] You see, proclaiming that gospel is primary for him, and that makes everything else secondary. It doesn't mean that everything else is unimportant. It's just second. That means that even Paul's personal situation is measured in the light of how it might serve the primary task of making Jesus known.

And his situation in prison has resulted in the gospel being proclaimed. And for this, he has great joy. But he then goes on to explain two areas in which his personal situation has resulted in gospel proclamation.

First, his situation in prison has resulted in members of the palace guard becoming aware that he's in chains for a cause, Jesus Christ.

And second, his situation in prison has resulted in his fellow Christians outside of prison being encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.

In verse 15, Paul tells us that there are two groups of such people, two groups of Christians who have turned more strongly to gospel proclamation. Both are preaching the true gospel of Jesus Christ and him crucified.

[8 : 00] But they have very different motives. Can you see them there? The first group are those who are preaching out of goodwill. Now, I think the term goodwill probably doesn't refer to goodwill toward Paul.

I think it probably means God's goodwill towards Paul and his gospel. Let me explain. Have a look at verse 16. Verse 16 tells us that these people have a deep love for Paul and that they know he's been appointed by the goodwill of God to preach the gospel and defend the gospel.

So out of love for Paul and out of respect for his cause of preaching Christ, they've taken up the task themselves. He's in prison. He can't do it. They will do it.

Paul's imprisonment, in other words, has stirred up others to join him in his God-appointed task. But then there's the other group, the second group. Paul tells us about them in verses 15 and 17.

They too have turned to preach the gospel. But their preaching springs from envy and rivalry. Now, I think perhaps what Paul is doing is he's referring to a group of people, of Christian people, who had publicly opposed Paul and his cause in some way, if not publicly, privately.

[9 : 12] And they're preaching with no worthy motive than to annoy Paul. Seems a strange way to go about things, doesn't it? But think about it. Perhaps they want to make him frustrated with his imprisonment.

You know, think, we'll get about preaching the gospel and he'll be really annoyed because he'd rather be out there doing it himself. Look at what Paul's conclusion, though, is in verse 18. He says, Why does it matter?

The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this, I rejoice. Incredible way of looking at things, isn't it? I really don't care which motive they're after.

But if they're out preaching the gospel, that is great and that makes me happy. Again, we get a glimpse, don't we, into how he thinks. Because the thing he lives for is gospel preaching and because gospel preaching is progressing as a result of his imprisonment, he thinks, oh, well, that's okay.

My imprisonment has caused the good cause of the gospel to go ahead. It would be better, undoubtedly, for people's motives to be purer. But the most important thing is that Christ is preached and he is being preached and therefore Paul is full of joy.

[10 : 25] In the last part of verse 18, Paul begins to think about his future. And he says that in his future, he'll continue to rejoice. But then in the second half of verse 19, he talks about his deliverance.

Can you see it there? And the word he uses is the usual word that is used in the New Testament for salvation. And I wonder whether Paul is talking about his deliverance of salvation on the last day.

So Paul is therefore saying that he believes that he'll still be confessing Christ and therefore be amongst God's saved people on that last day. He doesn't believe that anything that happens, in other words, to him in court or in prison is going to stop that.

In fact, he believes that as the Philippians pray for him, he will stand firm and be saved. And he believes that he'll receive the help of the spirit of Jesus Christ as a result of their prayers.

And then he spells it out in verse 20. He says, because of the prayers of you Philippians, because of the help of the spirit of Jesus Christ, I eagerly expect and hope that I won't be ashamed.

[11 : 33] In fact, Paul anticipates that Christ will be exalted through him and his witness to him. And he anticipates that this will be the cause no matter whether life or death is the result.

Although then he goes on to say that, I think I'll actually stay around. And that'll be good for you. In verses 21 to 26, he builds on this thought about life and death.

And he makes that very memorable statement. Most of you will have heard it before and know and recall it. For me to live is Christ. And to die is gain.

Earlier on, you see, we found that Paul had found something to live for. In fact, you could say that for Paul, life means Christ. He has put everything aside, you see, that might have been of value to him.

As he'll say later on in Philippians 3, he's considered everything else as dung for the sake of being related to Jesus. Paul has died, you see, to an old way of living and he's risen to a new life in Christ.

[12 : 39] And his whole existence now finds its meaning in Jesus. For Paul, you see, it's not about living, it's about Jesus. And here Paul adds another element.

He tells us that what he has found in Christ goes beyond the grave. Going on living, you see, will mean fruitful Christian ministry. It means progress of the gospel, for the gospel, and Jesus.

It means continuing on with the Philippians in their progress and joy in the faith, and that'll be good. But death would mean the culmination of all that he'd ever lived for. Because what would death mean?

It would mean the immeasurable richness of being in the presence of Jesus Christ. To live would be Christ. And to die would be gain.

Can you see what Paul is saying? He's saying that he has found the greatest treasure that a person can find. He's found relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

[13 : 39] That has enriched his life. It's given him a reason for living. It has filled that life he has with joy. It has drawn him into the ministry of the gospel, working alongside God in bringing others to know Jesus.

And it's given him also something to die for. And when he dies, it will simply be an even greater and richer experience than he's had here on earth.

Paul, you see, he's a man filled with joy, isn't he? He rejoices in his imprisonment because it means the progress of the gospel. He rejoices in knowing that a future salvation is secure.

And he rejoices in that prospect of future salvation. And he rejoices also in the prospect of ministry amongst the people of God and the delight of seeing their progress in the faith.

Friends, this is a dedicated man, isn't it? A man who knows why he's living. A man with a cause.

Paul, you see, has found meaning and purpose in life.

[14 : 43] And he's found something that's even worth dying for. Let me say, friends, that the words of Paul here are rich and bold, aren't they? They're words that should embarrass many Christians, I think, though.

You see, the passion we see here in Paul is a passion I think that today we often associate with terrorists rather than Christians. And this passion puts us to shame.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we who are Christians have come to know Jesus Christ, the only true God. We have found the greatest treasure in life that there is to be found.

We have found him who is worth living and dying for. We have found a message to preach that is worth dedicating every scrap of energy and resources to promoting. In my view, the terrorists of this life are dedicating their lives to a mistake, to something that is wrong.

They are suiciding for a hope that will not be realised. But we as Christians in our Western capitalist world have been sucked in.

[16 : 01] We live the lives and values of our Western society, don't we? We are a long way away from being the dedicated persons that we see here in the life of Paul.

Many of the Christians that I know and sometimes I find myself among them are empty Christians, hollow Christians. Where Paul rejoices in his imprisonment because it results in progress of the Gospel, we gripe about the smallest of problems, don't we?

Where Paul worries about the favourable verdict he might receive from God on the last day, we worry about whether people will remember us or view us as important people in the world. Where Paul gives up the prospect of going to be with Christ in order to stay and serve the Philippians in their progress in the faith, we shy away from any thought of sacrifice.

Sisters and brothers, we are far too comfortable as Christians in the contemporary world. For many of us, the biggest acts of self-denial that we engage in have to do with diet, exercise or giving up watching television to go to church or whatever.

And even these token acts of self-denial are often flabby and far from rigorous. For many of us, for me to live is me and to die is a huge pity because it means leaving the life of this world.

[17 : 31] But Paul and Jesus make it clear, friends, the life of the Christian is a life of following. Five times in the four Gospels that Jesus says it is about taking up the cross and following him.

It's a life of dedication, a life of devotion to Christ. It's a life that has no greater goal than being in the presence of God and working hand in hand with God in the ministry of the Gospel.

It's a life of taking up the cross with a single mind following the dedicated Jesus Christ. And those who choose this life find what Paul found. They will find that it is full of joy and that the yoke of the cross is, as Jesus said, easy and the burden of Christ is light.

friends, I want to urge you today to recognise the great treasure we have in Jesus Christ and affirm that to live is Christ and to die is gain and to choose to take up our cross and follow Paul as he follows Jesus in doing whatever we can to ensure that Christ is honoured by us whether in life or death.

let us choose to be different for, friends, you see, of all the people in this world we alone have the ultimate thing, the ultimate person to live for and we alone have the truth that is worth dying for and we alone have the ultimate cause for rejoicing and we alone have a real hope because we have a real God as revealed in his real son Jesus Christ.

[19 : 15] So let's pray. Father, for us to live is Christ and to die and follow and help us to do what we can to ensure that Christ is honoured by us whether in life or death for we know that of all people in the world we alone have the ultimate thing, the ultimate person to live for.

So Father, please help us live as people who have a real hope, a real future and a real God and we pray this in Jesus' name.
Amen.