

Pioneers Wanted - Part 3

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[0 : 00] So what's the most important thing in life for you? I'd like to share with you about a young man who learned about what was most important in life from a neighbor of his.

It had been some time since Jack had seen the old man. College, girls, life, all of these things had taken place and he was on his way up in his job and there was rush in his busy life.

Jack had little time to think about the past and often had no time to spend with his wife and his son. He was working on his future and nothing could stop him.

Over the phone, his mother told him, Mr. Belzer died last night, funerals Wednesday. Memories flashed before him and flashed through his mind like an old newsreel.

And he sat there remembering his childhood days. Jack, did you hear me? His mother said, Oh, I'm sorry, Mom. Yes, I heard you. It's been so long since I thought of him.

[1 : 11] Sorry. I actually had thought he had died years ago. Well, he didn't forget you. Every time I saw him, he would ask how you were doing.

Jack, by the way, had left his hometown, had moved across the country and working on his career. His mom said he would reminisce about the days past when you spent over on his side of the fence, as he liked to say.

He said, Mom, I loved that old house that he lived in. And she said, You know, Jack, after your father died, Mr. Belzer would stop in to make sure that you had a man's influence on your life.

He's the one that taught me carpentry, he said. As a matter of fact, I wouldn't be in this line of work today if it wasn't for Mr. Belzer. He spent a lot of time teaching me the things that were important.

Mom, don't worry. I'll be there. So he took the next flight out to his hometown, kept his word. And Mr. Belzer's funeral was small and uneventful.

[2 : 19] He didn't have any children. And most of his family was already gone. So the night before he was set to return home, he and his mom went over next door to check on Mr. Belzer's house.

And they stood there in the doorway. Jack paused for a moment. And it was like crossing over into another dimension. And into another time. And every step that they took held memories.

And as he looked around, every picture, every piece of furniture. And then Jack stopped suddenly. What's wrong, Jack?

His mom said. He said, It's not there. And she said, What's not there? He said, The box. She said, Well, what box?

He said there was a small gold box that he kept locked on the top of his desk. I must have asked him a thousand times what was in that box. And all he ever told me was, The thing I value most.

[3 : 24] Jack said. It was gone. Everything else in the house was exactly where he remembered it. Except for the box. He thought, Well, maybe one of Mr. Belzer's relatives had taken it.

Well, that was all he thought of it. Went back next door. He said, I better get some sleep. My flight leaves early. So it was about two weeks later.

And he was going about his day. And returning home from work one day, he found a note in his mailbox. It said, Signature required. Stop by main post office within the next three days.

That's what the note read. Early the next day, Jack went to the post office and retrieved the package. It was a small box that looked like it had been mailed 100 years ago. Well, he hurried to his car, got in, and he opened up the box.

And inside the box, there was a small gold box with a note. And he noticed on the return address, Harold Belzer.

[4 : 34] So as he ripped open the package, there he looked. His hands were shaking as he read the note. And here's what the note read. Upon my death, please forward this box and its contents to Jack Bennett.

It's the thing I value most in my life. A small key was taped to the letter. His heart racing, his tears filled his eyes. Jack carefully unlocked the box.

There inside, he found a beautifully etched gold pocket watch. And as Jack was reminiscing, he ran his fingers over the finely etched details of the watch.

And then he opened the latch and opened the cover. Inside, he found these words engraved. Jack, thanks for your time, Mr. Belzer.

The most important thing to Mr. Belzer was my time. Right there, Jack called his office and canceled all of his appointments for the next two days.

[5 : 45] His assistant, Janet, asked, well, what's going on? He said, I need to take a couple of days off and spend some time with my son. And by the way, Janet, thanks for your time.

What do you value the most? What is the thing in your life that's most important to you? You know, when we're down and things are difficult in life and our future opportunities are constricted, life has a way of distilling down and revealing to us the things that are most important to us.

So let's think about that this morning as we unpack these verses in Philippians chapter 1. When all else is gone, what is the most important thing to us?

It was because of the apostle Paul's single-mindedness and his single-minded passion that he knew what was most important. In part, this led to Paul's crisis.

So let's read, starting with verse number 19 through verse 26. For I know, verse 19 says, that this will turn out for my deliverance.

[7 : 02] This is back from Paul's chains, Paul's critics, and now we come to Paul's crisis. He says, for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor.

Yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better, nevertheless, to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.

And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you for your progress and joy of faith, that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.

It was because of Paul's chains Christ was known. We saw that in verse number 13. And because of Paul's critics, Christ was preached.

[8 : 35] Both those that preached for the wrong reasons and also for the right reasons, we saw in verse number 18. But it was because of Paul's crisis that Jesus Christ was magnified and exalted.

We see that in verse number 20. It was possible that Paul would be found a traitor to Rome and then be executed. That's what Paul was potentially looking forward to.

His preliminary trial had gone fairly well, but he wasn't sure what the final verdict would be and he wasn't sure how this would go. Paul's body wasn't his own and his only desire was for Jesus Christ to be preached.

Why? Because he had the single mind. All he wanted in life was to make sure that Jesus Christ was preached, that people knew about what Jesus Christ had done for them.

And he wanted to magnify Christ in his body. So in our text this morning, we see two things that you and I should be living for.

[9 : 45] Two things that should be most important in our lives and the things that should permeate our entire lives. The first thing that we see that we are to be living for is to magnify Christ.

Everything that we do day in, day out, everything that we say, everything that we think is to or ought to be to magnify Christ.

Let's look verses 19 and 20. He says, For I know that all of this, this imprisonment, this trial, this potential death sentence will turn out for my deliverance.

Now, Paul is not being Pollyannish here. He is not saying, well, you know what? Everything's going to be hunky-dory and I'm going to be released and everything will be fine.

And you know what? Happy thoughts. What was Paul thinking about his deliverance? Well, we find out from that in a few verses in the context. So if we just stopped here, we would think, well, Paul

was looking at being released.

[10:47] Paul was going to be delivered just like he was when they prayed for him. And the doors of the prison were unlocked and opened and out he was able to go.

And he knocked on the door. And that young girl, Rhoda, slammed the door in his face because she thought it was a ghost. So I don't think this is the case here. I think Paul knew full well that either he would be released or he would be killed.

And so those were the two options that he saw either way. Either way, he would be what? He'd be delivered. Either delivered from chains or delivered from this life and ushered on into the next.

So as a man of convictions, Paul shared his assurance that his chains would eventually result in his deliverance. Now, the Greek word translated here, deliverance, was used in different ways in the New Testament.

It often meant spiritual deliverance, as in salvation, that we would be delivered from our sins, delivered from death, being born again.

[11:58] That we see here in verse number 19. Paul used the word to refer either to the final stage of his salvation. Because we know that salvation is an event and salvation is a process.

Because we're not fully delivered from this life, from our sin nature. One day we will be fully delivered and our salvation will be consummated when we stand before Jesus Christ in heaven.

So it was an event in the sense that when we trusted Christ, sins were forgiven, placed in the body of Christ, baptized into the body of Christ, sealed. But one day we will see it come to fruition.

And so he is either talking about that final stage of his salvation. We see that in Romans chapter 5, verse number 9.

You can read there when you have time. In Romans chapter 5, verse 9, he talks about that ultimate time. Or, potentially, his future vindication in the Roman court.

[13:03] So either way, it was either being delivered from this life and ushered into heaven and seeing the full realization of his salvation. Or that he would be vindicated and he would be released from his chains.

So it seems unlikely that he had his release in mind because the next two sentences, you know, he wrote about the possibility of his near death, of his potential or possible execution.

So he was looking at both of those. So Paul wasn't sure whether he would experience release or martyrdom. There are still Christians around the world who are being martyred for their faith.

There are still followers of Jesus Christ who are around the world in certain countries that have to worship God in secret.

And if they share their faith, there's a good possibility that they may be arrested, they may be sentenced to death, or just simply executed because they are not following the rules of their country.

[14:13] So Paul may have been looking at potential martyrdom. But he was certain of one thing, that he wanted Christ in verse number 19 and verse number 20 to be magnified.

He wanted his body to magnify Christ. Verses 22, verse 23, verse 24. He wanted God to be magnified in his life.

Now this was Paul's expectation. If we see here in verse number 20, if you look there in verse number 20, he says, According to my, what does he say there?

My earnest expectation. Then he said, At the end of my life, there's nothing that I would have done, and all of my life I would not be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, that Christ would be magnified in my body.

Now that Greek word that's used here for earnest expectation is only used here and in Romans 8, verse 19. And the meaning of that word means to strain one's neck to catch a glimpse of something future, something that is ahead.

[15:32] So if you see something that's far away or around the corner, and you strain your neck out to look, that's the word. Paul says, It's my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing, he says, that I would be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, that Christ would be magnified in my body.

So Paul's concern wasn't what would happen to him. Isn't that most of our worries in life? What happened to me? What will happen? Will I lose my job? Will I still have money for retirement? Will I this? Will I that? Will I be able to go on vacation? Will I? Whatever. You know, we worry about ourselves, and we worry about what will happen to us.

Paul, on the other hand, had only one concern. Would Christ be magnified in my body? Whether by life or death, he wanted Christ to be magnified. He wanted Christ to be exalted, no matter what would happen.

Release would allow him to do what? If he were released from prison, what would it allow him to do? Preach the word, right. So it would allow him to continue preaching the word, but martyrdom would also do what?

[16:50] Same thing, advance the cause of Christ. And so living and preaching the word, or living and sharing the gospel would advance the kingdom.

But being martyred, you know, it has an effect. For some people who are marginal, it makes them more afraid of sharing their faith. But for others, it emboldens them.

If Paul was willing to die for his faith, then maybe I am too. And so it would still move the kingdom forward and advance the cause of Christ.

So the question is, does Christ need to be magnified? If you think about it, a telescope, a star, is larger than a telescope.

But what does a telescope do? A telescope brings it closer. A telescope magnifies that star and brings it closer to us.

[17:54] So we ask our question, how can a mere human being magnify God? Well, our bodies are supposed to be telescopes that bring Christ closer to people.

Because to the average person, Christ is just a misty figure that died centuries ago. But when they look at our life and when they see us, when they see us go through a crisis and they see us being able to prevail through the grace and the power of God, what it does is it brings Jesus much closer, much more close to them.

So to the follower of Jesus Christ with a single mind, Christ is with us here and now. He's not some faraway God. He's imminent. He is with us.

He is close. So the telescope brings far things closer and the microscope makes tiny things look big. To most people, how big is God?

For those who are apart from God, to those who don't know God, He's very little in their life. And for some, He's non-existent in their life.

[19:09] If we think about the things that are around us, can we see everything around us? I'm not getting metaphysical here. I'm talking about physical.

There are certain things that we just cannot see. Now, this may sound gross, but you hear the articles all the time about what's on your pillow.

Right? Stuff that you can't see, but stuff that just sloughs off when we lay our head down. And if you take a microscope and you look at your pillow, you would probably never want to do what again?

Touch that pillow again, right? So the point is, the microscope brings things into our view that we would never see otherwise.

And so to the follower of Jesus' life, or in the follower of Jesus' life, what we do is we magnify God so that everyone around us can all of a sudden, wow, there's God, and God must be in your life.

[20:18] I can see God in your life. Couldn't see Him before, but wow, how did you get through what you went through? So just as the telescope brings far things closer, the microscope brings small things, or makes small things look big.

So Paul wasn't afraid of either life or death. Either way, he wanted to magnify Christ in his body. You know, it's no wonder he had joy.

So the question is, are we exalting Christ in our life? Are we bringing Him closer for people around us?

Are we magnifying Christ in our life so others around us can see Him? So to exalt Christ means to give Him the proper honor, the proper glory, the proper praise that He truly deserves.

And we exalt Him by our attitudes, by our actions, and our words. So let's live to exalt Christ in everything that we do. So that's the first thing that we see in the life of the Apostle Paul.

[21:26] He lived to magnify Christ. But there's something else that we see. He lived to serve others. He lived to magnify Christ.

And in the following verses, verses 21, 22, and all the way through verse 26, we see that He lived to serve others.

Look at verse 21 through 26. He says, For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. So in verse 21, Paul says, For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Now most people focus on that second part of that verse. To die is gain. You know, we think about, oh, it's going to be a great day someday when we get to heaven, when we all get to heaven. And we think about that glorious day, and it's almost like we want to skip over this life and just move ahead to the end and be with Him. And we see a lot of the hymns in the hymn book, a lot of the hymns in the hymn book talk about that glorious day.

[22 : 37] Well, that's all well and good. The thing is, God left us on the earth for a reason. And we're to magnify Him. We are to share the gospel. We are to make disciples.

And so let's not rush that end. Let's live today and make the most of our time as we go through it. But we shouldn't overlook what comes before, life today, life right now.

So the importance of the phrase, to live is Christ, can't be overstated. As a matter of fact, it should be the main purpose of every Christian's life. To live is Christ.

And as we saw, Paul's main purpose in living was to glorify Christ, to exalt Him, to magnify Him in His body. And so for all intents and purposes, Christ was the essence of Paul's life.

Yet he knew that if he were martyred, he would be glorified through the promotion of the gospel.

And Paul himself would benefit because he would be with Jesus one day. And it would either result in his deliverance or it would result in his martyrdom.

[23 : 46] Now, it's interesting that in verse 21, for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. The word here, to die, suggests the act of dying, not the state of death.

And you say, well, what's the point? Well, the thing is, Paul here is not saying necessarily that to live is, or to die after death is gain.

He was saying that the act of dying, in the sense here, he was saying, to live is Christ. My goal, the essence here is Jesus Christ.

But in my execution, in the act of dying, he said, that is going to turn out, that is going to ultimately result in gain for me.

So here, Paul is really seriously looking at the potential, the very likelihood that he may be executed.

[24 : 55] Now, Paul here confesses that he has a difficult decision. He says, verse 22, But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor.

Yet what I shall choose, I cannot tell, for I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.

What we're seeing here is, he says, to remain alive was important because it would mean that I could continue being with you all and continue sharing the gospel, continue teaching you, continue being there with you.

Now, notice in your Bible that the verb *is* is in italics. If you look here, you see, for *to me, to live, is* is in italics, and *to die, is*, again, is in italics.

What does that mean? If you see words in your Bible, in your translation, that are italicized, it means they're not there in the original. But there's nothing wrong with that.

[26 : 08] It just means that it wasn't there in the original. And the translators who translated it into English added it to make it read more, make it to allow it to flow when we read it.

So we read it, for *to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain*. But Paul actually wrote, for me, to live, Christ, to die, gain.

That's what Paul wrote. For *to me, to live, Christ, to die, gain*. It makes it more powerful, doesn't it? It makes it more impactful when we read it the way Paul wrote it.

For *to me, to live, Christ, for to me, to die, gain*. And this is the philosophy of Christian living.

For us to be living, it's to be Christ. To live Christ, to die, gain. Dr. William Pettingill used to say that gain is always more of the same thing.

[27 : 12] If *to live is Christ*, then *to die would be more Christ*. So it means to go and be with Him. Now we're all familiar.

Now stop for a moment here. There are some that use Philippians chapter 1 verse 21 and say, to say that Paul was depressed and Paul thought of ending his life.

This was a crisis situation. There are those who say that and use it to talk about, well, you know, there are people in the Bible that were depressed and considered ending their life.

There are other characters in the Bible that were depressed and considered ending their life. But Paul was not one of them. You say, well, pastor, how can you be so sure? Context.

Context. Because if we keep on reading and if we look at the situation here, Paul was not thinking of ending his own life and that was not his crisis.

[28 : 13] Because Paul, remember, if we see the context, Paul was either going to be delivered by being released or by being executed. So that was, he was hard pressed.

Which one do I pray for? Which one do I want more? Which one do I, which one do I prefer? Now, most of us, that's kind of a no-brainer. I want to live.

I want to be released. But for Paul, he saw the big picture. So for Paul, it was, I'm hard pressed. If I live, it's better for you.

But if I die, it's better for me. So he was hard pressed between the two. I mean, which one do you prefer? But what was Paul's main goal? That Christ would be glorified.

Christ would be glorified either way. But what was also in Paul's heart? He lived to serve others. So in his mind, living would be better for everyone around him because he could continue sharing the gospel and he would be better for them.

[29 : 21] Now, we're all familiar with situations that are so dreadful in life that we might look forward to death. It might be living with chronic pain. It might be living with chronic, severe, emotional pain.

And there are many that I've talked to, there are many that I've dealt with that have said, it's not that I want to die, it's that I don't want to go on living with this pain. I can't see going on like this.

And that was their crisis. So this is not the situation here where life for Paul was so dreadful that he wanted relief, but I think here Paul is not saying that death was better than the worst of life, or that death is better than the worst of life.

He's saying that death is better than the best of life. Let me say that again, let it sink in. Paul is not saying that death is better than the worst of life.

He is saying that death is better than the best of life. Think about it. Think about the most awesome, greatest, most glorious thing in your life.

[30 : 39] Paul is saying death's better than that. He's saying, that's morbid. No. Because for the follower of Jesus Christ, what happens in death?

It ushers us into the presence of God. So Paul says, death for the believer is better than the best part of your life. You should hear an amen. You know, that's normally not preached.

That's normally not thought of. That death is better than life. Death is better than the best of life. But most people live for what? Live for the here and now. And so death would stop all these good things, things.

But for one like the apostle Paul, what death meant for him was to be ushered into the presence of his Lord and his master.

So in other words, he wasn't longing for death as a way out of unbearable circumstances. He was longing for it as a way into unspeakable, glorious circumstances. So Paul's main purpose living here on earth was to serve others.

[31 : 44] He said in verse 22, he said, but if I live in the flesh, this will mean fruit for my labor. Yet what I shall choose I cannot tell.

He says, he goes on, he says that for his heart pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ far better. Verse 24, nevertheless, to remain in the flesh is more needful for you. There's more to the Christian life than just anticipating glory. It's living here and now for him. There's a lost world around us and they need to hear Jesus.

The writer Henry James said, the best use for your life is to invest it in something that will outlast yours. The best use for your life is to invest it into something that will outlast yours.

The best use of our life. So for the follower of Christ, it's the here and now where we're doing things for others that will last an eternity. There's work right now that we can do for Christ.

[32 : 51] Paul was committed to serving him. That's why he says in verse 23, he desired to depart, but it would be better for them, for those that he was writing to, if he were to stay.

So from the standpoint of the apostle Paul's personal welfare, there, Paul would prefer being with Christ. All of his problems would be over. No more headaches, no more heartaches, no more chains, none of this.

So Paul's not proclaiming here his desire to be ushered in to glory by death necessarily, but he's saying, if I weigh the two, for me, glory better, for you, staying here, better.

So his attitude wasn't an escape from life. Paul knew and understood his life's goal. He knew that ultimately it was about living for Christ.

So he's ready to serve others either way. So Paul had an intense longing for heaven. What did Jesus Christ say in Matthew 20, 28?

[33 : 55] He said, the Son of Man didn't come to be served, but he came to serve. And to give his life as a what? A ransom for many.

That's why Jesus came. Jesus came to actually give his life. He came to serve, not to be served. So from the Christian's perspective, our attitude should be, let me serve, not necessarily be served.

So going back to the question, what are you living for? What's the most important thing in your life? For Paul, Christ. Everything else he says, he did it for Christ.

His whole life wrapped around Christ. Paul was clear and focused on this purpose. He knew what he was living for, and he was living to exalt Christ. What are we living for?

So as Christians, I believe we honestly need to evaluate our lives in light of this question, for what am I living? Or phrased another way, what am I living for?

[34 : 55] It's easy to fall into living for good things. It's easy to fall into living for the better things in life, for the vacations, the good times, the travel.

God has blessed us with family, with friends, possessions, work, all those things like that. But if we're not careful, those things can become what we live for.

So let's be careful. And as we closer, as a closer walk with God, consistent time with Him, and an attitude of submission, this can change our attitude towards what's most important to me.

So can we confidently say this morning, for me to live, Christ, to die, gain. So Philippians 121, in your take home this week, that's our memory verse, that's our key verse.

So let's do this. This is our assignment for this morning, for this week. So what we can do is, when we read it, for to me to live, blank.

[36 : 09] For me to die, blank. And you fill in the blanks yourself. For some, for me to live is money, and to die, leave it all behind.

could be, for me to live is fame, and to die is to be forgotten. For me to live is power, and to die is lose it all.

For me to live is, fill in the blank. Now we need to echo Paul's convictions if we're going to have joy, in spite of circumstances, promises, and if we're going to share in the furtherance of the gospel.

For to me to live, Christ, and to die, gain. Let's pray. Our dear father, this morning, as we have come to this section of your word, and when life gets tough, and when our future gets constricted, and we're not sure where to turn, and everything else around us seems to be fading into the distance, the things that are more important to us seem to come into clearer focus.

So this morning, Father, help us to know and to understand and to be honest with ourselves and to ask ourselves the question, what's most important in my life?

[37 : 39] And I pray dear Lord, that we would be able to know and understand what it means to live for you. We're thankful for all of this.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.