

To Live is Christ and To Die is Gain

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[0 : 00] Philippians chapter 1 and let's turn to verse 19. Philippians chapter 1 and verse 19. For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance as it is my eager expectation and hope that 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 for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain if I am to live in the flesh that means fruitful labor for me yet what which I shall choose I cannot tell I'm hard-pressed between the two my desire is to depart and be with Christ for that is far better but to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account convinced of this I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus because of my coming to you again if anyone ever tells you that by becoming a Christian your life is going to get easier don't ever ever believe that message if anyone tells you that becoming a Christian is going to make your life richer or more prosperous don't ever believe that person that is a false gospel it's not what we find in the pages of the Bible if you want to know what being a Christian is like this is where you come to you don't even look at somebody who you know is a Christian because every experience of living the Christian life is slightly different sometimes radically different if you want to know what being a Christian is you come to the pages of the Bible because for the Apostle Paul his life was full of persecutions and hardships and and living it rough is I guess the best way to put it there's a place in the in one of his writings where he tells us all the beatings and the imprisonments and the shipwrecks that he had to suffer and all because of he could have had it so different if he had remained as a Pharisee as a promising Pharisee full of intelligence rising up the ladder of success his life would have been full of ease and yet now he would never have returned to that for one moment he was prepared to suffer even death itself because of what changed on the day that he came that he met with Jesus on the road to Damascus the Saul of Tarshish the self-righteous Saul who tried his best to win the favor of God by by keeping the commandments and by being as religious a person as he possibly could just like millions of people other trying to win the favor of God by doing their best all of that came to an end it came crashing down when he met with Jesus Christ the risen Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus and that was the day that he discovered his own sinfulness up until that point the cup was half full as a Pharisee he always looked on the bright side after all I've been faithful I've ticked all the boxes

I've done everything right I know that there might be one or two faults but in the main I've done everything right and if God doesn't accept a person like me then what hope is there for anyone but the moment he came to know Jesus on the road to Damascus everything his whole view of himself changed he saw his filth and his guilt and his shame in all that he had tried to do to win the favor of God and he saw how rubbish it was that's the way he describes it that's his words not mine it's it was rubbish but he also discovered that if he was to be right with God then there was nothing he could do to secure that salvation it had to be the work of God himself and when he met with Jesus he discovered that it had been done that Jesus death at Calvary had paid the price for his sin and that he didn't need to do anything to win the favor of God he was a new person the power of the gospel took hold of him it changed his will it changed his heart it changed his mind it made him into a new creation altogether and from that moment onwards his life was reoriented with God at the center and that meant he was prepared to face any kind of hardship it didn't matter what it was if he went from town to town and in one town they decided to stone him as they did from place to place even to the point of almost dying he was prepared to do that there's that very interesting chapter in chapter 13 of Acts where they stone him and it looks as if he's dead the next thing he gets up and off he is again preaching the gospel same gospel you would think that he would go home and give up but that wasn't the apostle Paul because he had found he had found something which was so precious and so vital and so essential he wanted everyone to know this Jesus that he had found woe is me he said if I do not preach the gospel that became his life's ambition he knew that he wasn't a very persuasive speaker he wasn't a big guy who was fluent and persuasive it looks as if he was quite a small fellow and he wasn't very impressive at all but when he opened his mouth and spoke the gospel something happened

God stepped in and God took over and changed people through the word of the gospel that the good news that Paul went about preaching and on this occasion he was in prison and it appears that the church suffered from the same thing that it suffers from in many many generations and that is an over dependence on its leaders they needed to learn that their leaders were dispensable as the church had to learn all the way through 2,000 years of history and very often making the same mistake again becoming too dependent on its leaders so when when Paul was taken to prison when he was put to prison and when it looked as if he might even die then the church was deeply concerned what were they going to do without Paul and Paul is saying it doesn't matter whether I'm here or whether I'm not here if I'm here I will do my best to give you what encouragement and what help you need but the moment the Lord takes me away from here he will make other preparation I'm ready for it I'm ready to go I'm ready to meet with the Lord he says that again in second Timothy chapter one and this really was the last letter that he wrote he said I am not ashamed because he says I know I know who I have believed I know this Jesus whom I have believed and I'm persuaded that he is able to keep that which I've committed unto him against that day Paul was able to face death the reality of death itself looking at death straight in the face knowing that nothing was going to shake him that's what the gospel does to a person it gives us the certainty that looks to Jesus and rests in him and him alone and I want to ask you this evening I've asked it often before and who knows maybe this evening we've changed course I don't know what purpose there is in this but I'm going to ask you do you have that certainty in life and in death that Jesus is your savior do you have that certainty I didn't ask would you like to have the certainty well that's the next question but I'm asking you right now yes or no do you have that certainty in which you're able to say for me to live is Christ that's what we just read for I'm not ashamed for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain now there's a man who knows where he is in life he doesn't know what's going to happen to him tomorrow neither do we it hasn't been revealed to him he doesn't know the future and yet he lives his life with a purpose that no one else except a Christian has that says for me to live is Christ and to die is gain can you say that tonight is Christ your life and if you were to die tonight for whatever reason would it be gain to you isn't that the most extraordinary statement isn't that the most extraordinary conclusion to come to

Paul doesn't know what's going to happen to him that's why he's saying it he doesn't know the outcome of his imprisonment it could be one or the other it can only be one or the other he's either going to live or he's going to die and the way things were at that time there was a very real and present danger of him his life having to be forfeited and he genuinely didn't know well he suspected what would happen but he didn't know for sure and yet it's almost like it doesn't matter to him in fact there's a sense in which he's saying if I die that's the best option in fact he says it he says if I die it means for me to be with Christ but that is far better which is far better I'm asking you tonight do you have that confidence can you say tonight that I know the Lord I know Jesus Christ as my savior and I have I know there's many things that I don't know but I know this that Jesus the son of God died for me and and he saved me from my sin and what that means is that I know him as my savior and if I died if he chose to took my to take my life today then I would go to be with Christ no one else can say to die is gain it seems the most absurd thing to say to die is gain you go to anybody in the world tonight and you say well ask them for the reaction to that statement they say well they're nuts life is about living in the world and making the most out of life life is about the opportunities that you have in this world nobody would ever say to die is gain some people would say well to die is necessary if you're in a war situation you're putting your life in risk and in danger and there are times when the danger is so much that it becomes inevitable that you are going to die to die is necessary but you still can't say to die is gain only a Christian can say that and I want you to notice what it is about death in which Paul says it is gain it's something that is it is going to profit me he says that if I die I will be with Christ so for the Christian death is being with Christ going that very moment to be with Christ and he says if that is the case then that is better by far the old version puts it better by far far better it's better by far because it means that no longer is the the suffering that Paul had to go through in this world no longer would he have to face the danger and the uncertainty the hatred and the opposition he had done his the work that God had given him to do he had brought it to a completion and if that was the moment that God chose to take him out of this world then so be it because for him it would be leaving a world that was full of pain and imprisonment and beating and shipwrecks and and entering into perfection itself being presented before the the Jesus the glow the the glorious Jesus whose face he would see and gaze upon from for all eternity for him it would be joining with every other person of God who had been removed from this world and who had died in faith for him it would be joining the greatest assembly in the universe if we could call it that the perfect assembly of

God praising and worshiping God in perfection forever and ever but he says to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account again he wasn't sure exactly what was going to happen he suspected that he would be released from prison I'm not sure how he suspected that but it does appear from what he says that that was his suspicion so be it again but it's not going to make any difference I'm not going to learn my lesson from the Romans and go away and change my career I am going to be do exactly what I've been doing up until now and if it involves me if it means my being imprisoned yet again so be it I'm ready for anything and even if one person hears the gospel either by my being in prison or being released then God is glorified to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account convinced of this I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus because of my coming to you again so for Paul it was for life or death Christ was the same whether in life or in death life for the apostle Paul meant a life that was oriented towards Jesus that was motivated by Jesus that was shaped and governed by Jesus that was led and guided by Jesus Jesus was for Paul everything to him he was all and in all

[15:34] Paul couldn't even contemplate a life without Jesus and he couldn't contemplate a life without making Jesus known because he knew from having watched people coming to faith in Jesus that it was through the message of the gospel and it still is it's the message of the gospel that changes people's lives the same message that Paul heard and that Paul shared and that Paul lived for and the same message that took hold of people the hardened pagan people we were thinking this morning in the Gaelic of the the Philippian jailer what kind of person this was if God can change a man like that a hardened semi-retired soldier who would think nothing of killing you if he thought that that you were going to escape from the prison a man who spent his life in warfare and violence if God can change a person like that and he did and Paul watched him God watched him melting as he explained the gospel to him the same gospel as he explained to countless other people and they too had come to faith in Jesus Christ that's why Paul said the gospel is the power of God to salvation and so tonight that's what you need you need to hear that message the message that Jesus died for sinners that there is a God a God who created you in his image and whose image has become polluted and stained you have become lost because of sin you've become condemned because of sin just like me and everyone else here and yet God has sent his son to reconcile us to himself to restore us back to himself through his death on the cross so tonight what would you say to the gospel can you say with the apostle for me to live as Christ and to die as gain because it's only the person that can say for me to live as Christ that's where it begins living here in this world only the person that can say for me to live as Christ that can say to die is gain for Paul there was no gray area it was one or the other you were either in Christ or outside of Christ you were either saved or lost you were either condemned or set free by the Lord it was one or the other you were either following Jesus or you're not and I'm going to ask you tonight that if you're not following Jesus then put that right ask the Lord to save you now this evening ask him to change you like he changed the apostle Paul to change your heart to change your mind to change your direction and to to open up your heart to receive the Lord Jesus Christ and to give you that new direction which one day will result in glory eternal life being with Christ which is better by far let's join together in prayer our father in heaven we thank you for your your word to us and we thank you Lord for the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ which is always the same and never changes we pray Lord that as we've heard again

of how Jesus came into our world to save broken people like ourselves we pray to see our own lostness and brokenness we pray to see how much we need Jesus and we pray to come to him give us that faith oh Lord that that rests in Jesus and that receives him to be our savior for we ask in his name and for his sake Amen Amen