

Focussed On Living And Dying

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[0 : 00] Turn for a little to the chapter we read in Philippians, chapter 1. We'll read from verse 15.

Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of rivalry, not sincerely, but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.

What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yet I will rejoice, 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 which I shall choose I cannot tell.

[1 : 18] I am 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.

Paul was in prison for Christ. It wasn't that Paul wanted to be in prison, because there was no man who wanted to travel more than the Apostle Paul.

In fact, Paul's travelings, and when you think of the day that he lived in, were really quite amazing. He was somebody that really got around.

So for somebody of his nature and his character, and somebody who was so fired up to do the will of God, which involved proclaiming the unsearchable riches of Christ, of going around preaching, to be locked up in prison seemed just so hard and so unfair and so difficult.

But of course the Apostle, while he was locked up in prison there, we read some quite remarkable things that he tells us.

[2 : 32] We know that the Apostle, he was somebody who loved to go to the marketplaces. He loved to challenge people, because in the pagan society in which he lived, Paul went everywhere, and he challenged people about the Gospel.

And it was often at a great cost to himself. But this is what he was chosen to do, what he was sent to do, and that which he delighted to do.

But here he is, he's in prison. And it's very interesting, Paul doesn't spend his time in prison moping and complaining, which would be very, very easy to do.

It would be so easy if you put yourself in that situation, and God has given you a commission to go out into the world and to spread the Gospel. And Paul had been setting up churches and establishing these churches in places like Philippi and in Ephesus and in Corinth and all these places.

And then find yourself in prison. You'd be saying, Lord, what's all this about? Why have you done this to me? Surely, I should be out there proclaiming the Word.

[3 : 46] But the thing is that Paul in prison realised that this was part of God's purpose and God's plan for him. And so Paul, in prison, was doing what came naturally to him and that was to witness for Christ, to talk about Christ and to proclaim Christ.

And history reveals to us that in the Imperial Guard there were 9,000 soldiers. And these would be, these were the Imperial Guard, the prison guard, they'd be involved in guarding prisoners.

So for two years, Paul was in prison and the guards would be changed over all the time. So when you do your maths there and you realise that if you're doing two years, that every day Paul would be, not necessarily different soldiers every single day, but a lot of soldiers would have come in contact with the Apostle.

And we believe that many of them came to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ because Paul tells us that what has been happening in the prison is turning out to the advancement of the Gospel.

In other words, that the Gospel is flourishing, it is growing, which simply means people are coming to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. So you see, Paul, God had a work for Paul to do to reach certain people and it was only in prison that he was going to reach them.

[5 : 17] And so that is part of the wonderful thing about the Apostle is as we say, he wasn't moping or complaining, but he was just doing, continuing to do the work that God had given to him.

And Paul actually was rejoicing in what was happening. Now, again, the other thing is we would not have, you see, God's purposes are often so hidden to us and often they don't make sense.

And I'm sure even many of the Christians in the different churches would be wondering, when earth is Paul in prison? But the wonderful thing is we wouldn't have these prison letters were it not for the fact that Paul was in prison.

So you can see how God was ruling over everything and Paul was sending these letters to the different churches because he couldn't get to them. And he was addressing issues and problems within the church and of course he was exalting the Lord Jesus Christ.

And there's great truths, great doctrines come out of it. And of course it was the Lord who gave him what to say. But this is all part of what we have as a scripture. So we see the purposes of God, that God is overruling everything and we've got to remember that it's exactly the same in your life and my life.

[6 : 41] Not just in the Apostle Paul's life but in everybody's life. He has a purpose and a plan for everybody. And so we have to learn to submit before his way and his will which is often different to the way and the will that we would have chosen for ourselves.

Because very often when we look at life things don't turn out the way we expected. And we're saying this is not what I had hoped for. This is not what I wanted.

But anyway here's Paul in prison. And Paul shows us in prison here that there are two things that the church should be involved in. They should be defending and they should be proclaiming the gospel.

Both these things to be defending and proclaiming the gospel. And in verse 16 he talks about his defense of the gospel. He says that the latter out of love knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel.

Now this word, the particular word that is used here has the idea of somebody making their defense in court. Now if any person is going to act as a defense in the court then they obviously have to know all the facts and they have to know the procedures and they have to know what everything is about.

[8 : 07] And so it is in the gospel. And that is why it is important that the Christian is rooted in God's word. So that we are able to defend the faith when we come under attack.

Which we're constantly under attack. Because that's the nature of the day that we live in. truth. And so we need to be able to have a real grasp of the truth.

Because people will often ask. People will challenge us. See, Christianity has been hammered for so long. And particularly the society that we're living in with all the different the whole area of science and philosophies and humanism and secularism.

which just has invaded the whole of society and seems to influence society. The Christian faith is being battered and it's being squashed and it's being squeezed.

And so it's important for the Christian because they will be often put into positions where they have to defend what they stand for and defend the faith.

[9 : 14] And so the apostle is very clear on this. And again so many people are ignorant about the Christian faith. You know when you look around today and you say these are dark days.

There's nothing new under the sun. Today isn't any darker than the day that the apostle Paul lived in. And sometimes we think what's going to happen?

These are terrible days and the Christian faith is going to be smothered. Well you look at history and it's the one thing that has never been smothered.

And the Lord will see to it that the Christian faith will continue to develop and it will grow. That doesn't mean that it's always going to flourish and grow at a great pace here in our own land.

But it will throughout this world. And as we know there are millions and millions and millions been converted in parts of China. There's a massive work going on with so many people coming to faith

in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[10:23] And so although the Christian is under attack it's important as the Bible says we must be ready to give a reason for the hope that is within us.

But also not only are we to defend the faith but we're also to preach the gospel. That's what the apostle says. And as you know people will often say that the best form of defense is attack. So there's times that we have to go out with the gospel. And it's our duty to spread the gospel and to tell people about the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now wherever Paul went he faced opposition. And there were those who were trying to undermine him. Those who were trying to undermine the gospel, undermine him, undermine his preaching. And of course this was very difficult for him. And there were always the Judaizers. These were people who said okay you have faith in Jesus Christ but you need more.

[11:28] It's not enough. You need to have extra. You need to have aspects of the old Jewish law. You need to have circumcision in order that you will be truly a Christian.

And so they were really affecting the apostles' message. message. Because the apostle who was a Jew of all Jews and he really deals with the like of this in chapter 3 in that very well known chapter of how he highlights there was nobody who was more steeped in the Jewish faith than he was and who was more zealous of the faith than he was.

And yet he says all that I had, all these privileges, I count them but rubbish, but refuse to be discarded. There is only one way and that is straightforward faith in Jesus Christ, nothing else. No works, we haven't anything that we can add to it. It's all been accomplished in Christ and it is receiving Christ and resting in Christ alone for salvation.

And that was Paul's great message. But there were always those people who were coming behind him. And Paul talks here about there were people preaching, some were preaching out of sympathy with the apostle, but some were preaching in a totally different way.

[12:52] They were preaching out of rivalry. They were preaching for themselves. They were trying to build up their own following. They were wanting people to follow them and that's something the apostle faced in different churches.

For instance, in Corinth, it was the same. Some were saying, I'm of Apollos, I'm of Paul, I'm of Cephas. They were looking at different leaders within the church and they were saying, that's who I'm following.

And so Paul is saying that there are these people and they're preaching and they're doing it out of rivalry. They're doing it for their own advancement, their own glory. And that's about the worst thing that you can do with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Christ is to be in it for yourself. To be in it to try and make a name for yourself, to get anything for yourself. It's an abuse of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Christ. But the amazing thing that the apostle says here is that even although there are those who are preaching it with a wrong motive and preaching it out of selfishness and rivalry, Paul actually rejoices.

[14:11] I find it's an amazing statement. Why? Because Christ is being preached. changed. And there's quite a lesson there for us in this. And it shows us that we should always be thankful even although maybe people have a different way, different practices than ourselves.

If they are preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and him crucified and him alone and faith in Jesus Christ, although there might be things about it that we don't agree with, we should still be thankful that Christ is being preached.

Because that's the spirit of the apostle. He was thankful even although things weren't the way that he would have wanted, still thankful that Jesus Christ was being preached.

And then Paul takes us to another dimension. Because Paul knows very well that he could be put to death at any time. Here he is in prison.

And he knows that Christians have been put to death all over the place. In fact, he was part of the very first Christian that was put to death.

[15:26] He was somebody who was, it tells us, that he was consenting to it. In other words, he gave his backing to the martyrdom of Stephen.

Remember how they stoned Stephen. Well, Paul, or Saul as he was then, he gave his backing to that. And in fact, those who actually carried out the stoning, you remember how they took off their outer cloaks, and it was Saul who was looking after their clothes, with them in spirit and in heart and

part of them.

And from that martyrdom of Stephen, there was like an explosion of killings. And Christians were being killed all over.

So the apostle knew all about it. In fact, he himself, after it was like a bloodlust had been born in his heart, the stoning of Stephen. And he gave his whole being to the slaughter and the imprisonment of Christians.

Remember how it tells us that he was breathing out slaughter against the church. He couldn't have something more devastating than that. And that's the way he was until the Lord stopped him in his tracks.

[16 : 35] And you know it's sometimes good for us when God stops us in his tracks. But here is the apostle and he's facing the possibility of death. And in an amazing display of single mindedness, Paul is saying, it doesn't matter.

I don't really mind. whether I'm put to death or whether I live. That's basically what it's saying. Either way, he's saying, it's Christ for me.

I wonder if we're able to say something like that as well. Are you able today to say, you know, if I continue living, then that's great, but my life is Christ.

But if I die, then that's all right, because it will be more Christ. That's how the apostle was. And in verse 20, he says that Christ will be honoured in my body, whether by life or by death.

In the A.V. it's got the word magnified. And you might say, how can the Lord be honoured or magnified by a person? Surely you can't make the Lord greater than he is.

[17 : 58] Well, you know that a telescope, that a star, is way, way, way bigger than any telescope. But when you put a telescope on the star, it's enlarged and you're able to see it far clearer and a greater understanding of it.

and that's really what Paul is saying, that by his life, whether it's by living or by dying, that his life will be like a telescope that will enable people to see the Lord clearer and better.

And that should be a part of our prayer as well. Lord, may my life, may my life be such that people will be able to see Jesus more clearly through me.

because so many people don't know. They have no idea who Jesus Christ is. As far as Christ is concerned, Jesus is concerned for a lot of people, he is a character from the mists of history like Julius Caesar or Alexander the Great, somebody who was of great influence or importance in his day, but they see no relevance today in Jesus Christ.

But you know, it's amazing how often when, sometimes when a Christian is going through a very difficult thing, and God's grace is shining in that passion, and the Lord Jesus Christ is so evident in that passion, that people are influenced because they're able to see, they're able to see something.

[19 : 37] Do you know there's quite a number of people who have started following the Lord simply because of the impression that was created by Christians in difficult situations and in difficult times.

They were so impressed. It so challenged them. Christ was revealed in that person's life and they began to think. They began to think maybe for the first time.

And so that's what the apostle is highlighting here, that through his life or whether it is life or his death, that the Lord will be glorified, will be honoured.

And so Paul is in a quandary as to which you prefer. He knows that to remain is obviously for the benefit of the church. It would be better for the church in Philippi if he was to remain.

But if it's death, he doesn't mind. Now, we know that death is something that we recoil from. It's a king of terror.

[20 : 41] And it's not that the apostle was looking forward to actual death itself. He wasn't saying, I can't wait to die. He was looking at what was to immediately follow, death.

And that is the great hope that the Christian has. And so the word the apostle uses about departing is the word that a soldier would take down the tent and moving away.

And that's exactly what happens. Here we are in our body. Our body will be taken down. It will be laid in the grave and our souls will depart to be with Christ.

And so Paul makes a great statement. For me to live is Christ and to die is gain. And that brings us to, you can't read that without saying to sure.

Okay, where am I in this? What is my life? Because Paul is saying very simply my life is Christ.

What's your life? And if you went around Stornway today and asked people what's your life?

[21 : 52] What's your life? What is your life? Probably quite a lot of people would say I have no idea. Never really thought about that. Because there's a lot of people who just live life.

they exist. They've never really gone in deep as to why they're here or what happens when they die. They just live day by day.

And so they wouldn't really be able to give you any answer. Other people would say well my life is about enjoyment. I want to get as much pleasure out of life. I want to have as good a time as I possibly can.

But I suppose the majority of people would say if you said to them what is your life? I suppose the majority would say well my family, my work, my home, my activities, these things that's kind of what makes up my life.

And that is absolutely true. And I'm not going to say for one moment that shouldn't be. Because our families would give our life for our family.

[23 : 00] Which shows that our family in many ways is our life. But that is not a contradiction of what the apostle is saying. Because the way that Paul lived, Paul had really strong relationships with people.

And really strong friendships. And great love for people and churches and individuals. But at the heart of it all was Christ.

Everything was centered in Jesus Christ. And that's how it should be for the Christian. That Christ is at the center. It's in him that we live, move, and have our being.

And all the blessings that we have, we ought to see them as coming from him. And that we ought to live to him in the blessings that he has given us. So this is how the apostle was living.

So he says, for me to live is Christ. It's at the very heart of everything. And it's in Jesus Christ we actually have everything. In Christ we have, it's in Jesus Christ that we have peace with God.

[24 : 09] It's in Jesus Christ that we have the joy of the Holy Spirit. It's in Jesus Christ that we become heirs and joint heirs of God.

It is through Jesus Christ that we are adopted into the family of God. It is in and through Jesus Christ that we are given grace and strength to deal and to cope with all the different trials that we face in life.

So the apostle says, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain. Is that how it is for you?

That death or what immediately follows it will be gain? there is a beautiful version I say that talks of glory. It tells there the wicked cease from troubling and there the weary be at rest.

Isn't that a beautiful picture? There the wicked cease from troubling. You think of this life and you think of all the things that have troubled you and do trouble you and are there ahead of you that you fear will trouble you?

[25 : 29] All the troubles, the trials, the darkneses, the threats, the fears, the temptations, all these things, they will be gone because there the wicked cease from troubling.

There the weary will be at rest. And in this world there is a lot that makes us weary. That we often become tired. Become tired physically, mentally, spiritually.

Because if we live in a tough day, it's hard being a Christian. And there are times that you feel that I've lost my way. I've lost I don't know what's going to happen to me.

Maybe you're lacking assurance and you feel you're going to fall short. You might be very conscious of your own faithlessness to the Lord. He is committed and faithful to you.

And He will make sure that whatever weariness you've known in this world, it will vanish away and you'll be at rest, eternal rest. And so this is a prospect that was in front of the apostle, what he delighted in, the spiritual pulse that was in his very heart.

[26 : 44] This is what he was hoping, what he was seeing, is that how it is for you. If not, then seek Jesus today. Let us pray.

Lord, we pray to bless us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places. We ask, Lord, that you will do us good and that we will know the riches of your grace, that we might be strengthened in the inner passion, that you will fill us with yourself, and that you will do us good day and night.

We pray that you will take us to our home safely and that you will grant us your grace in all that we're about. Have mercy upon us and cleanse us from our every sin. In Jesus' name we ask it.

Amen. We'll conclude singing in Psalm 73, the 73rd Psalm. Psalm 73, verse 24.

Psalm 73, verse 24. Psalm 73, 24 and 25 Psalm 73, 24 and 25

[28 : 59] Psalm 73, 24 and 25 Psalm 74, 24 and 25 Psalm 74, 24 and 25

Psalm 74, 24 and 25