

We are in the fifth week this morning of a sermon series through the New Testament book known as Philippians, which I am calling “To live is Christ and to die is gain,” a line which will be a part of today’s passage. Philippians is a letter written by the Apostle Paul sometime between 60-64 AD to a church in Philippi that he had a deep affection for, which he had started about 10-15 years earlier. This morning we will be in verses 20-26 of chapter 1, but to set the context, let me start at the beginning, reminding you of what we’ve read and looked at the past three weeks:

Philippians 1:1-26 - Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: ² Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³ I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴ In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶ being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the **day of Christ Jesus**. ⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. ⁸ God can testify how I long for all of you with the **affection of Christ Jesus**. ⁹ And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ-- to the glory and **praise of God**. ¹² Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. ¹³ As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. ¹⁴ Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly. ¹⁵ It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. ¹⁶ The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the **defense of the gospel**. ¹⁷ The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. ¹⁸ But what 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. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, ¹⁹ for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for **my deliverance**. ²⁰ I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴ but it is more necessary for you that I **remain in the body**. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of

you for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.

As we learn in verse 13, Paul is writing this letter from prison in Rome. He has been unjustly imprisoned for the charge of inciting an insurrection or rebellion. His trial is still in the future, and he does not know if he will survive and be released or if he will be executed. And as he considers the options, he goes back and forth between life and death, considering what each outcome would mean for him. And in a powerful thesis statement in verse 21, he concludes *“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”* My life, declares Paul, is about Jesus – knowing Him, serving others in His name, living to glorify and enjoy Him. And so death, rather than a tragedy, would be gain, for then I would truly know Him and enjoy and glorify Him forever and ever. This is a truly Why is this belief so powerful? Three reasons:

1) A purpose that death can not take away

Paul’s thesis statement in verse 21 raises the all-important question for us to consider: how would you complete this sentence – “for to me, to live is...”? When you boil it all down to your primary motivation and goal in life, what is it? Are you even aware? What are some possible answers?

For to me, to live is **family**. The most important thing is my marriage, or my kids, spending time together and taking care of them.

For to me, to live is **pleasure**. Yeah, I work, but the goal of work is to make money so that I can enjoy life. I want to travel, buy toys, and live it up until I die.

For to me, to live is my **career**. I want to reach the top of my profession, be known as the best teacher or doctor or accountant.

For to me, to live is **my honor and reputation**. I want to make a name for myself, be known as an important or good or powerful person.

For to me, to live is **love**. I want to experience true, deep, love. And if I no longer love the person I am with, then I will find love somewhere else.

It could be any number of other things – a hobby, personal glory, comfort, money.

But here’s the thing. **If you answer that question with anything other than Christ, then the second part of that equation is consistent: to die is loss.** As long as your reason for

living is something in this world, then to die is loss. Health fades, career fades, pleasure fades, honor fades, family members die. And so death is something to be avoided, to be feared, to be put off as long as possible, because death means loss. So what are we to do? The key is to recognize that the joy, the beauty, the freedom, the purpose that you are seeking are not truly found in family, career, reputation, but in the one who gives us those things to enjoy for this brief time on earth. C.S. Lewis put it this way in *The Weight of Glory*:

“The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not in them, it only came through them, and what came through them was longing. These things—the beauty, the memory of our own past—are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited.”

If you try to find your life and purpose in anything in this world, then death will mean loss. The answer comes when you realize that you are longing for something to which those good things – family, pleasure, career, honor, reputation – point. When your life is Jesus, you can enjoy all of those things in their proper place, as gifts from God, knowing that death will only enhance your joy, because the one you have been living for will be yours forever. Rather than lose Jesus, you gain Him fully. I can still give my all to my family, my career, and so on, but they will never be my life.

So what are you living for? How would you complete the sentence, “for to me, to live is...”? If you are living for something on this earth, you are trusting in something that will in the end let you down. You are longing for something that is through that thing. You were made for God. There is only one purpose in life that death can not touch but only enhances. And not only will it give me Jesus fully, but also it will enhance family, pleasure, career, reputation, and love.

2) No fear of death

Philippians 1:21-23 - *For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.*

When Christ is your life, death is gain. It is no longer something to be feared.

Paul does not have a death wish. He is not longing for death in an unhealthy way. Honestly, some people love this verse because they are escapist, longing to die because of how brutal life is. But Paul sees both life and death as good. As long as he has breath, he will give His life to serving God and serving others. And when he dies, he will have all that his heart has longed for. Because of Jesus, he is not afraid of dying.

Hebrews 2:14-15 - *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death-- that is, the devil-- ¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their **fear of death**.*

I do not have to fear death, because it will be the fulfillment of the longings of my heart. Listen to some other promises in the Bible about death:

1 Corinthians 13:9-13 - *For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. ¹¹ When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. ¹² Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. ¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.*

We will see God face to face, and we will know love.

Romans 8:19-23 - *The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be **liberated from its bondage to decay** and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. ²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³ Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*

Our bodies and this creation will be redeemed, set free from decay.

Revelation 21:1-6 - *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne*

saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ He will wipe every tear **from their eyes**. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." ⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶ He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.

There will be no more suffering or crying or death or pain.

1 Corinthians 15:51-57 - Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-- ⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been **swallowed up in victory**." ⁵⁵ "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" ⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is not a promise to everyone. This is a promise to those who trust in Jesus Christ:

John 11:25-26 - Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶ and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

John 3:16-18 - "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

Jesus died on the cross for our sins, to make a way for us to be right with God. If there is no God, then death is the end. If your purpose is located in this world, then death will be loss. But if Christ is your life, then death will be gain. I know we are speaking to things beyond our comprehension, but my understanding is that our joy and peace and love will be beyond comprehension and never grow old, forever and ever.

3) A life of eternal significance

Life is about more than dying and going to heaven. If that's all it were about, then God would beam us up to heaven when we were saved. But we are here for a purpose.

²² If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴ but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.

As Martin Luther said, "God does not need your good works, but your neighbor does." We are not saved by our good works, but we are saved in order to do good works.

Ephesians 2:8-10 - *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

You have been given a vocation. You have been given gifts to be used to serve others.

1 Peter 4:10 - *Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.*

1 Corinthians 12:4-7 - *There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶ There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. ⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.*

How has God gifted you? How can you use that to serve others? Think SHAPE – Spiritual Gifts, Heart, Abilities, Personality, Experience. God has given you a vocation, calling, gifts. Everything you do to serve others in Jesus' name matters eternally.

Matthew 10:42 - *And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward."*

1 Corinthians 15:58 - *Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.*

Because of the resurrection, because death is gain, everything we do for the Lord here on earth matters eternally.

Bruce Milne – "Every kingdom work, whether publicly performed or privately endeavoured, partakes of the kingdom's imperishable character. Every honest intention, every stumbling word of witness, every resistance of temptation, every motion of worship, every struggle towards obedience, every mumbled prayer, everything, literally, which flows out of our faith-relationship with the Ever-Living One, will find its place in the ever-living heavenly order which will dawn at his coming."

To live is Christ and to die is gain. Because of Jesus, we have a purpose that death can not take away. We do not have to fear death. And we can live a life of eternal significance.

Let me close with the words of JI Packer:

JI Packer – "Hearts on earth may say in the course of a joyful experience, 'I don't want this ever to end.' But invariably it does. The hearts of those in heaven say, 'I want this to go on forever.' And it will. There is no better news than this."