

Fil-Am Community Church
Pastor David Bennett
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Philippians 1:21-23

“To Live is Christ!

Good morning Fil-Am so good to see you here this morning, your presence is not taken for granted and greatly appreciated.

The New Year is always an opportunity to reflect, on things done over the last year, not to dwell on it, but to capitalize on the things done well and resolve the things done not so well. In addition to that it is a chance as a church to look forward at what the New Year holds for us, we look forward keeping our eyes on Christ, to let him rule and reign in every area of our lives. It's not that we will get more of him, but the reverse, that we will give him more of us.

To Live is Christ, to Die is gain, is the verse we will dissecting today.

Tug McGraw, Tim McGraw's father, was hospitalized with a brain tumor in March 2003. He found out that day that he had cancer and was given three weeks to live-he survived nine months.

Tim McGraw recorded this song in memory of his father. It is by far one of my favorite songs in country music because when we hear it, it causes most of us to stop and consider a very important question.

Some of the lyrics are;

He said

I went skydiving,
I went Rocky Mountain climbing,
I went 2.7 seconds on a bull named Fu Manchu,
And I loved deeper,
And I spoke sweeter,
And I gave forgiveness I'd been denying,
And he said,

Someday I hope you get the chance,
To live like you were dying.

How would you or I live my life if I knew that I was dying? If I knew I only had a short period of time to live

- How would I live?
- How would I make decisions?
- How would I treat other people?

The key verse for today is Philippians 1:21-23,

Philippians 1:21-23 (NASB)

²¹ “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. ²³ But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better;”

Philippians 1:21-23 (Amplified Bible)

²¹ “For me to live is Christ [His life in me], and to die is gain [the gain of the glory of eternity].²² If, however, it is to be life in the flesh and I am to live on here, that means fruitful service for me; so I can say nothing as to my personal preference [I cannot choose], ²³ But I am hard pressed between the two. My yearning desire is to depart (to be free of this world, to set forth) and be with Christ, for that is far, far better;”

There are a few things Paul’s message makes consider, the first point we will discuss this morning is...

1. What are you living for?

The answer to this question defines the meaning behind your entire life.

Some will answer the question, I am living for money, others for fame, but for the true believer it should reflect the proclamation of Paul, I am living for Christ.

Think about it,

- If you live for money, one day it will all be left behind;

- If you are living for fortune or fame, when you die you will be forgotten;
- If you live for Christ, your life is full and even when you depart this life, you will be given the blessings of the relationship with God made possible through Christ.

As we come to see the origin of this book we find that Paul was in prison under less than desirable conditions.

His life was not going good, and he was beset by enemies both physical and spiritual on every hand. Yet, when defined, this man's life was his desire to tell everyone about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul let us know that if he lives it would be for Christ, and if he would die, he would gain a standing before Christ and receive the promise of the Lord.

Even when life is harsh, God is always good, and even in the midst of the possibility of death, Paul found meaning in life, but that meaning and value can only be beneficial when it is given in the service of Christ.

Saints remember Jesus talked about the Narrow and Wide Gates in Matthew 7:13-14 (NASB)

¹³ "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. ¹⁴ For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it."

Paul had an expectation of HOPE.

Paul's expectation of hope is that he can honor Christ in everything.

We too, can be patient and expect our lives to glorify Christ every day, we will have chances to honor Him, and with everything we do.

Matthew 5:16 (NASB)

"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven"

Paul wanted others to be encouraged as well as relationships to be strengthened or restored, this brought him joy; even in the face of expecting (immediate) execution

He was able to maintain his focus and not allow worldly circumstances deter him from his plan, his vision of spreading the Good news of His personal Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

He was able to rise above circumstances because he kept his focus on his life's Vision.

Wisdom is vital when it comes to God's word, and our application is critical as application requires a vision, and a vision.

Proverbs 29:18 (KJV) says, *"Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he."*

Remember our Motto for 2017 is Building people to build the Church, this year as Pastor Rolly preached last week we are concentrating on Body Building, investing in our people and watch the transformation begin. The vision is to build the body of Christ vice trying to build the building of Christ.

You will hear this again and again this year as we embark on a campaign to build the body and equip each of you here to be the ministers God called you to be, we offer you the opportunity to get involved with this church Wide Movement will do everything we can to help you see the change, feel the change and be the change that needed in 2017.

Getting back to the key verse for today, *"To live is Christ and die is gain"* we see that the entire substance of the Apostle Paul's life and what he looked to beyond this life.

Everything that Paul did revolved around his Lord whom he served.

He knew that his Lord promises salvation that cannot be hindered by death, but is only brought closer by it. Thus, death was viewed as a valuable thing.

That is what we are about to dig a little deeper into.

The first point we discussed was “What are you living for?”

The second thing we will discuss is...

2. How do you view death?

It is so hard for many to look at death the way Paul did, to see death as a gain and not a loss, something to look forward to, vice dread.

There is a beautiful video/drama that deals with this subject that is one hour and 45 minutes long called the Bema Seat, dealing with what happens when you die? If you would like to do this with your home group let me know and I would be glad to come in set it up, it is well worth the time.

OK getting back to Paul’s view on death, the only way he was able to view death in this way unless they live for Christ.

Psalm 23:4 (NASB)

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”

Without Christ, death is an enemy of man.

Those of the world fear death. Most people don't like to even talk about death and dying. Most shun the subject or make jokes about it as if it isn't real. But death is real.

We can't hide from it or avoid it. No one escapes death. For those who are without the Lord, having never rendered obedience to his gospel and thus not striving to live for Him, death is a terrifying thought.

For these there is nothing but a terrifying expectation of judgment to look forward to after death.

For believers it is our ticket home.

John 11:25-26 (NASB)

²⁵ *“Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me will live even if he dies, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.”*

We need to look at how God view death?

Psalms 116:15 *“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His godly ones”*

The world may view death as a terrible enemy, but God views death as a precious thing for those who are righteous.

The only way to be righteous before God is through Jesus, living for Him. Without Christ, death is a terrible, fearful, thing.

To live with the constant fear of death is a pitiful slavery. Yet Jesus came, suffered, and died that He might set men free from the fear of death.

The only way we can view death as God views it, is through Jesus. For the Christian, death is gain not loss, because through the blood of Christ we are made righteous, free from sin and can stand blameless before a Holy God.

For the Christian, "to die is gain." They can be assured of this fact through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Having lived for His Father, He died, was raised from the dead, and glorified.

This is the very thing God promises us if we live for Him. Jesus is proof in that He has already received it and tells us,

1 Peter 3:18 (NASB)

“For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;”

The only way we can say that to die is gain is if we are living for Christ.

Are you?

As we have said many times today but Paul is in prison in the city of Rome, facing trial, knowing he's going to be executed for his faith in Christ.

So he writes a letter to the church in Philippi, and tells them, "This is what I believe: "To live is Christ and to die is gain."

This is a man facing execution.

Nero was the emperor of Rome at this time. Paul would have to stand before Nero and give his defense for why he came under charges.

Besides being put to death, the Christians were made to serve as objects of amusement.

- They were clothed in the hides of beasts and torn to death by dogs.
- Others were crucified.
- Others were set on fire to serve to illuminate the night when daylight failed.

This is what's going on in Rome when Paul wrote, "To live is Christ, and to die is gain." There is an emperor who is torturing Christians to satisfy his own wicked desires. This is the guy that Paul is going up against.

Every religion has to answer two questions:

- What is life? and,
- What is death?

Let's look at this whole passage, Philippians 1:18-30 (NASB)

¹⁸ What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice, ¹⁹ for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, ²⁰ according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, 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 But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. ²³ But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; ²⁴ yet to remain on in the flesh is more

necessary for your sake. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again. ²⁷ Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; ²⁸ in no way alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God. ²⁹ For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, ³⁰ experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.”

Paul says, "I don't know how this is going to turn out.

I'm in prison, my trial is coming up, and I don't know if I will be found guilty and executed.

But if I die, I count it as gain because I get to be with Jesus right away.

But no matter what happens, I want you to continue moving forward in the faith, advancing the gospel."

Paul was able to face adversary because he was centered on Christ in everything he does.

The first point we discussed was “What are you living for?”

The second point we discussed was, “How do you view death?”

The next point is...

3. Who is our Center?

It has to be Christ, because if you put the center anywhere else it will fail!

1 Peter 5:6-7 (NASB)

⁶ “Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, ⁷ casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.”

As we look at Paul's situation and ask who his Center was, it goes without saying he was "All-In" for Christ in everything he did.

We are a little more selfish and want everything to revolve around...

- Us,
- Our dreams,
- Our hopes,
- Our ambitions,
- Our plans.

Galatians 6:3 NIV, *"For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself."*

G.K. Chesterton told a parable about a boy who was given the magical opportunity to become small or big.

Predictably, the boy chose to be made gigantic. And in a matter of three minutes, he could stride across North America. He could go up to Mount Everest and kick it over like a sand castle.

But after a few days of this he got bored because the whole earth felt as big as his back yard. There was no one to play with and nothing to do.

Had that boy instead chosen to be made small, his back yard could have been like the Amazon rain forest. He could have spent his whole life exploring just his back yard, just his neighborhood.

- We like to make ourselves **BIG**.
- We place ourselves at the center of the solar system.

The older I get my focus, my center changes, I really want to get smaller, not bigger. I would much rather want God to be bigger so I can get lost in who he is.

We make ourselves the center and become an Idol, or maybe it's a job or just about anything, that replaces Christ as the center.

The first point we discussed was "What are you living for?"

The second point we discussed was, "How do you view death?"

The third point we discussed was, "Who is our Center?"

The last point we will discuss is...

4. What are your idols?

Saints, we need to realize Idolatry is putting anything other than God at the center of your life, at the center of your solar system.

Darrin Patrick says, "An idol is anything that gets more glory, more weight, more importance in our eyes than God does."

What was the first commandment God gave to his people? "You shall have no other gods before me."

We don't want Jesus to be an add-on. We don't want to have our life, our way, with a little Jesus on top.

What drives you? Here are seven questions to help you discover your idols.

Ponder these questions we are about to go through...

- What do I worry about most?
- If I failed at it or lost it, what would cause me to not even want to live?
- What do I use to comfort myself when things go badly or when things are difficult?
- What preoccupies me? What do I daydream about? Where do I fixate my thoughts?
- What makes me feel worthy? What is the first thing I want people to know about me?
- What unanswered prayer would make me think about turning away from God?
- What do I expect out of life? What would make me happy?

Think about those questions. They can be used to help identify your **FOCUS**, and make sure it is the correct thing we should be focusing on.

I think there are four major idols, four major groups that our self-worship can fall under. These idols are really about the self.

a. Comfort

The first idol is comfort. That means you really like privacy, lack of stress, freedom. You worship comfort. Your greatest nightmares are stress and demands. Others can feel hurt by you because you chase comfort so much that you back away from difficult situations.

b. Approval

A second idol that a lot of us have is approval. You love affirmation. You want love, you want relationship. Your greatest nightmare is rejection, because you can't handle the thought of being discarded by somebody. Others may feel mothered by you, but a problem in your life is cowardice. Like those who idolize comfort, you back away from difficult situations.

c. Control

The third idol is control. This fore many is their idol. You really like self-discipline, certainty, and standards. Your greatest nightmare is uncertainty. You can't handle uncertainty. You do a lot of worrying.

d. Power

A fourth idol is power. You want success, you want to win, you want to influence. Your greatest nightmare is humiliation. You can't handle humiliation. Others often feel used by you. Your problem emotion is anger.

Notice what Paul didn't say in that prison cell.

- He didn't say, to live is self,
- He didn't say, to live is comfort.
- He didn't say, to live is approval,
- He didn't say, to live is control,
- He didn't say, to live is power.

He said, "To live is Christ," because he knew that Christ is greater than these idols we bow down to and build our lives upon. Christ is greater than comfort. He knows everything about you. He can comfort you better than anything else. Go to Christ for comfort.

Do you want approval? Christ died for you when you were at your worst, when there was nothing about you to commend yourself to God or other people. You can find all the approval you could ever want in Christ.

What about control? Christ holds the whole universe in his hands. Only in him can you find relief from the things you are afraid of. Only then can you let go of control.

And what about power? Christ will never leave you humiliated. He is faithful, and you can cling to him.

"To live is self; to live is to pursue these idols; to live is to bow down to comfort, approval, control, power." That's making yourself gigantic when your eyes are meant to be on God.

Galatians 5:24 *"Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."*

Living is being crucified with Jesus

Living is Christ! He who loses his life will find it. He who would follow me must take up his cross and follow me.

The cross today in many churches seems to no longer call for the death of sinners. It is more about a touchy feely sentiments, a watered down version of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

You must know the Apostles preached that the cross demands the death of your old sinful self, you must die to self to fully follow Christ, as a follower not just a fan.

We are not called by Jesus to be less of sinners we are called to His cross to come and die!

Galatians 2:20 *"I have been crucified with Christ"*

There's a story told of a country church which had a creeper vines, possibly an ivy plant that began growing up by the porch doorway.

Over the doorway was a text carved in stone, "We preach Christ crucified".

Over the years the plant grew steadily and a branch gradually spread over the doorway. The first word of the text covered by the leaves of the plant was "crucified" which reduced the text to "We preach Christ".

Well, we might think, that's unfortunate but the essential part of our faith is still there. As time went on the branch spread further and covered over the word "Christ".

Now, this was serious, but no-one seemed to notice, and the message of the church to the world outside was reduced to "We preach" - it had no message; the church was merely a talking shop.

The new cross of Christianity is used for comfort and convenience and escape from difficult circumstances.

The old rugged cross crucifies the desires of the flesh in order to bow before Jesus as Lord.

- Jesus' sacrificial death has provided the power we need to be free of sins power
- Jesus' sovereign grace has placed the choice of which nature to submit to on us
- Jesus' sanctifying spirit convicts us that sin is offensive to God and empowers us to deny our old desires.

That's why a Christian is invincible.

Because even if you kill me, I'm not defeated.

I get to be with Jesus. My death isn't the last you're going to see of me, because I'm going to live forever in the presence of Jesus, worshipping him. That's freedom.

Paul truly believed this. No matter what happened to Paul, he experienced more freedom.

- Do you want to throw me in prison?
- Do you want to beat me?
- Do you want to take away my money?
- Do you want to take my life?

I'm still free because to live is Christ.

My life....

- It's not based upon money,
- It's not based on position or power,
- It's not based upon freedom to do whatever I want.
- It's based on Jesus Christ, and he's never going to fail me. I'm always with him.

I can see the light of Christ shine in Paul as he came outside the gates of Rome, got down on his knees, bared his neck, and was beheaded for his faith in his personal Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, as he said "To live is Christ, and to die is gain."

I believe he faced that moment with fear, because we're all afraid of dying, however I also believe he faced that moment predominantly with joy of going home.

He believed this, it was as we say in Alabama he knew it down deep in his knower.

It wasn't just in his Bible, it wasn't just on the coffee mug, or a bumper sticker on his car, and it was on his heart. So he faced death with joy.

As we lean forward embracing all 2017 will bring to our door, how will we face it?

Conclusion

We started, this morning talking about the key verse Philippians 1:21 which says, "To live is Christ and to die is gain." But there are three words that we need to focus on which Paul said first, "For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain" (emphasis mine).

It's a personal conviction for him. It was a personal conviction, a truth that drives his life.

I'm praying for a miracle right now, for anyone here who have not made this the driving force of your lives, I want this to become the focus of your existence.

I want this to drive your lives. All of you here, this passage is a call to quit living for yourselves and look at the bigger picture.

This is a call to turn to Christ and ask him to come into your life and transform you.

This is a call to get off the sidelines and get in the game.

I want to know Christ in a more intimate way.

You might already know Christ but need to make a fresh commitment and make him the center of your life.

You might want to take a stand today for new beginnings, some may want to get on your feet, or get on our knees right now and pray.

We have people who will join you and pray with you, or pray for you.

Holy Spirit, I pray that you will fill us afresh with your power to live for Jesus Christ, to lay down our lives in this city for

- For our Wives,
- For our Kids,
- For our Family
- For our Friends
- For our Church,
- For those who don't know you.

In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.