

NOT DONE YET

Life, Death, and Why You're Still Here

Philippians 1:19-26

Tate Cox

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Introduction:

Tonight, we are going to be diving into some of the most exciting and emboldening words you've probably heard in a while. We're going to examine what Paul teaches about what it means to live, what it means to die, and why you and I are still here.

Now it might come as a surprise to some of you that I said, "to die" and "exciting/emboldening" in basically the same sentence, but if we truly grasp the point of what Paul writes here in Philippians, I think we will walk away excited and emboldened to live as God would have us to.

Am I the only one who's ever had the thought, "boy it'd sure be convenient if the moment we were saved we instantly shot up to heaven to be with our Lord"? Think about it. Given that Jesus saved us from eternal wrath, why didn't He just take us up right then and there in that moment of salvation?

I want you to keep this thought in the back of your mind as we move through tonight's message.

World Death Clock: you can actually go online and find this thing that just ticks up and up and up so quickly, signifying someone dying, someone entering into either an eternity with God or an eternity without Him. The World Death Clock estimates that every second nearly 2 people die, every minute around 107, every hour around 6400, every day around 153,000, every month 4.7 million, and every year 56 million. While these numbers are only estimates, this statistic is 100% accurate: 1 out of every 1 people will die.

We all know that death is a very real thing that every person must face (obviously not including the generation of believers that will be raptured).

William Wallace, the Scottish revolutionary, said, "Every man dies, not every man really lives".

As Christians, we ought to be the people who know what it means to live and what it means to die. Those who don't have Jesus do not know these things and yet we do. In our text tonight we'll see how Paul makes this awesome comparison of life and death and how the Christian is to live in balance between the two.

The Context:

We'd be doing a great disservice to ourselves if we were to just jump into the text and start breaking it down without first having examined what is presently going on in Paul's life as he writes this letter to the church at Philippi.

The letter to the Philippians is one of Paul's notorious prison epistles. At this point in Paul's life he is in prison (Phil 1:13-14) awaiting trial in Rome. Leading up to this point, Paul's recent years were like a movie!

In Jerusalem (around AD 57), Paul was recognized by some unbelieving Jews, and they seized him. They proceeded to take him and beat him, seeking to kill him because they thought he was a heretic. Basically, the whole city was in an uproar which caused the Roman commander to become involved and put an end to the disturbance.

Paul is seized by the Romans and was about to be taken to a Roman barracks when he asked for permission from the Roman commander to speak to the violent mob. The commander grants Paul this request and Paul proceeds to share his testimony of coming to Christ with them. The mob hears him out but, in the end, still wants him dead.

The commander takes him to the barracks to be scourged and it is then when Paul reveals his Roman citizenship to them. The commander then sends Paul to the Jewish governing body, the Sanhedrin. After Paul speaks with the Sanhedrin, the Roman commander sees that things are getting out of hand again and so he takes him back to the barracks.

While Paul is in the barracks, Paul's nephew warns the commander that the Jews had vowed to not eat or drink until they'd killed Paul. The commander responds by assembling a guard to take Paul to Governor Felix. Felix questions Paul on some things and says he will also question Paul's accusers. The high priest and his cronies come to Felix and give a case for why Paul should be put to death.

Basically, Felix plays politician and doesn't do anything about the situation. He keeps Paul imprisoned until he retires from his post as governor and is succeeded by Festus. The high priest again inquires of the new governor concerning Paul. After dealing with Festus' nonsense, Paul appeals to Caesar.

Paul is sent to Caesar but on the voyage, he is shipwrecked on the island Malta. After about three months, they sail again to Rome. Upon arrival, Paul was delivered as a prisoner. This two year-long imprisonment in Rome was actually somewhat loose. It was more of like a house arrest type situation rather than a prison cell one. And it is here in this imprisonment where Paul continues to await his trial that would determine his life or death in Rome.

It was during this imprisonment where Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians that we are examining tonight. He writes this letter to them not knowing what will happen to him. He greatly loved the church at Philippi and wanted to be with them, but he was unsure what the outcome of his trial would be.

Now that we've covered the context rather extensively, let's look at our first point tonight...

1. TO LIVE (vs 19-22)

“¹⁹For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, ²⁰ 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. ²¹ For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²² But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell.”

There is quite a big difference between simply being alive and really living. Paul understood what it meant to truly live: “to live is Christ”.

As believers, we should be the ones who know what it really means to live. The world doesn’t know what it means to really live because they do not know Jesus. Real life is found in Him and Him alone.

- **John 10:10** “¹⁰ The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly.”

A question I want to challenge you all with tonight is “what is my life centered around?”. The reality is that whatever your life is centered around, that is your identity.

Is your life centered around your career? That’s your identity. Is your life centered around being educated? That’s your identity.

Jesus wants us to center our lives around Him and Him alone. He desires to be the One we find our real identity in.

- **Matthew 6:33** “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all of these things shall be added to you.”

In verse 19, we read of how Paul, even in amidst the uncertainty of his situation, had a sense of confidence in his deliverance because of two realities:

1. He was being prayed for by the Philippians

- If you’ve ever done any research into the persecuted Church across the globe, you know the one thing they always ask for is PRAYER!
- **Hebrews 13:3** “³ Remember the prisoners as if chained with them—those who are mistreated—since you yourselves are in the body also.”
 - They are as much a part of the body as we are!
- I encourage you to join the Voice of the Martyrs prayer chain or follow them on social media so that you can pray specifically for the persecuted Church in the world.
- Paul knew that the prayers of the Philippians for his deliverance were being heard by God and it brought great comfort to him!

2. The supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ

- The indwelling of the Holy Spirit gave Paul the peace, comfort, strength, boldness, confidence, and patience he needed to face what he was facing.
- Every single thing that Paul needed was supplied by the Spirit.
 - My main prayer for those who are enduring trials, sicknesses, persecutions, etc. is that the Spirit of God would manifest Himself and make Himself so real to them.

Look back to verse 20 where we see how Paul understood that if he was to live on, it would be for the purpose of magnifying Christ Jesus!

If you're a believer in the Lord Jesus, ***your soul purpose is to magnify Christ!***

- No, it is not a typo that it says "soul" purpose rather than "sole". Both are accurate, but one is better.

MAGNIFY – *megalynō* (MEGALOOHOH): to deem/declare great; to esteem highly; to extol, laud, or celebrate; TO GIVE GLORY AND PRAISE

- **Luke 1:46-47** ⁴⁶And Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord. ⁴⁷And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.

Too many people are just floating through life without purpose, BUT THIS SHOULD NOT BE THE CASE FOR THE CHRIST FOLLOWER.

Westminster Catechism on the chief end of man: "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever."

God wants you to understand that the very purpose of your existence is to magnify Christ!

Illustration: What object comes to your mind when you hear the word magnify? A magnifying glass! Or a microscope or a telescope. Think about what these things do. The object that they magnify does not become bigger, but the view of it does. In the same way, you and I are to be magnifying glasses for Jesus in this lost world!

"Paul wanted to be a telescope to bring Jesus closer to their consciousness so they could see Him in all His glory and grace. Paul wanted to be a microscope to enlarge their vision of Christ." – John Phillips

- Sure you may be a teacher, but be a teacher that magnifies Christ!
- Sure you may be a salesman, be a salesman that magnifies Christ!
- You may be a secretary, be a secretary that magnifies Christ!
- You may be a construction worker, be a construction worker that magnifies Christ!
- I think you get the point by now.

Paul had the mindset of, “if I live, Christ WILL be magnified through my life; if I die, Christ WILL be magnified through my death!”

Now turn your attention to verse 21 where Paul pens some of the most faith-boosting words in all of Scripture when he says, “to live is Christ, and to die is gain”. Let’s focus on the first half of that statement since we’ll focus on the second half in our next point.

“TO LIVE IS CHRIST”

These amazing four words are genuinely four words that you should base your entire existence around! THIS IS YOUR PURPOSE IN THIS LIFE: TO LIVE FOR CHRIST!

“We may better understand the meaning of Philippians 1:21 if we consider for a moment what life means to many others. The Christless businessman, whose one aim is to obtain wealth, might well say, “To me to live is money.” The careless seeker after the world’s pleasures, if he told the truth, would say, “To me to live is worldly pleasure.” The carnal individual, given to luxurious living and self-gratification, would say, “To me to live is self.” The politician, exulting in the plaudits of the people and craving notoriety, might declare, “To me to live is fame and power.” But Paul could say, and every Christian should be able to say, “To me to live is Christ.” – H.A. Ironside

But what exactly does it mean to live is Christ?

Galatians 2:20 answers this question for us.

Galatians 2:20 “²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

- To live is Christ means coming to **the reality** that you’ve been crucified with Christ
 - We are to reckon the BC version of us as being dead!
 - **Colossians 3:3** “³ For *you died*, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”
 - **Romans 6:6** “*our old man was crucified with Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.”
 - We were once slaves of sin, living only for the desires of the flesh but because we were crucified with Christ, this is no longer the case!
 - **2 Corinthians 5:17** “Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; *old things have passed away*; behold, all things have become new.”
- To live is Christ means having **the mentality** that it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me

- **1 Corinthians 6:19-20** “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and *you are not your own?* ²⁰ For you were *bought at a price*; therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, *which are God’s.*”
 - It is not our life anymore because Christ paid for it!
 - We’ve willingly surrendered our lives to Jesus for His will and purpose!
 - “Christ lives in me”
 - Refers to the indwelling of the Spirit of Jesus
 - Refers to being a vessel for the Lord to carry out His will (Christ lives THROUGH me)
- To live is Christ means having **the lifestyle that is by faith in the Son of God**
 - Our faith is not to be quiet and invisible; rather, it is to be loud and on display for all to see through good works! Our faith in Jesus affects every single part of our lives!
 - **James 2:17-18** “¹⁷ Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. ¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.
 - Living by faith in the Son of God also means we conduct ourselves in constant trust in Him and His plans
 - **2 Corinthians 5:7** “⁷ For we walk by faith, not by sight.”
 - **Proverbs 3:5-6** “⁵ Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.
- To live is Christ means having **the motivation of Christ’s love and sacrifice**
 - Because I’ve encountered the love of God through Christ’s death for my sins, I willingly live for Him!
 - **2 Corinthians 5:14** “¹⁴ For the love of Christ compels us”

So, however much time God grants us to live here, TO LIVE IS CHRIST!

Let’s now move on to our second point tonight...

2. TO DIE (vs 21-23)

“²¹ For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²² But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.”

The reason why Paul was able to have such confidence in his life was because of his great confidence in death! He had the right perspective and outlook on what it means when someone who is in Christ dies!

“If to live is Christ, then to die would be more of Christ.” – J. Vernon McGee

The world absolutely hates to talk about death because they are not at peace with it, they dread it (and quite frankly they should). The horror of the great white throne of judgement awaits those who die without Christ. For them, death is absolutely NOT gain.

But it is not so for the Christian. We as believers have assurance of what happens to us when we die.

Hebrews 2:14-15 ¹⁴ Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and *release those who through fear of death* were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

- There are still millions of people who are living their lives in fear of death and bondage to it because they do not know the One who has defeated it!
- COVID really revealed to us how many people are living in fear of death and bondage to it.
- If you know Christ, His will for you is no longer live in fear of death!

Notice what Paul says here in Philippians 1 regarding death:

“To die is *gain*” (vs 21)

“A desire to *depart* and be with Christ, which is *far better*” (vs 23)

Gain – advantageous; the preferred choice

Depart – this word lends itself to the imagery of a ship sailing off into the distance

- This is how it is for the believer! It’s like we sail off into the presence of our beloved Jesus

In comparing life and death side by side, Paul makes it clear that death is actually superior for the Christian! How can this be?

We recognize that Christ has defeated death!

- **1 Corinthians 15:55** “⁵⁵ “O Death, where *is* your sting?
O Hades, where *is* your victory?”
- Illustration: Jesus standing over skeleton doing the Mohammed Ali pose

We recognize that death is like a graduation for the believer in Christ! We get an upgrade!

When a believer in Jesus passes away, they go directly into the presence of their Lord.

- **2 Corinthians 5:6-8** “⁶ So *we are* always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. ⁷ For we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸ We are confident, yes, well pleased rather *to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.*”

Because of these things, if you’re born again, you have no reason to fear death!

Mark Twain – “The fear of death follows from the fear of life. A man who lives fully is prepared to die at any time.”

- Living fully = a surrendered life to Jesus!

As we sing in the beloved song Christ Be Magnified, “death is just a doorway into resurrection life”.

Psalm 116:15 “¹⁵ Precious in the sight of the Lord
is the death of His saints.”

- The death of one who is in Christ is precious in the sight of the Lord because they go immediately into His glorious presence.

What must be known regarding the fact that to die is gain and being with Christ is far better is that it does not give one license to take their own life: God still has plans for you!

While we recognize the theological truth that to die is gain, we are not to take this matter into our own hands. If you’ve known a Christian who has taken their own life, be comforted that they’ve not committed the unforgivable sin.

- I don’t know where this wonky false teaching of suicide being the unforgivable came from, but it is simply not true.
- The only unforgivable sin is the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, which manifests itself in the utter reject of Christ Jesus.

Let’s now move on to our closing point

3. TO REMAIN – Why You’re Still Here (vs 24-26)

“²⁴ Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you. ²⁵ And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, ²⁶ that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.”

We might be tempted to think that if all these amazing things await me when I die, why do I still have to be here enduring all the difficulties I'm enduring?!

Even after Paul considered how greatly he wanted to depart and be with Christ because it was far better than anything in this life, Paul understood that for him to remain alive was more needed for the Philippians than his death was.

This wasn't a statement of pride. Paul was actively discipling and nurturing this church. They were growing because of his intentional spiritual fatherhood to them.

Like Paul, we should be able to make this statement too! We should so be discipling people (children, friends, coworkers, etc.) that it is more needful to them that we stay rather than go!

It's not that they need us, but they need the One we know, Christ!

We know that Paul would go on to be freed from this imprisonment because God still had more for him to do! And friend, God still has more for you to do! He wants to use you for His purpose and will in this world.

He's still working ON you (sanctification) and He's still wanting to work THROUGH you (being used by Him).

When you begin to understand the sovereignty of God in your life, it's like nothing can stop you! I live in such a way that until it's my time to go that has been appointed by God, it's like I'm invincible. This doesn't give me license to go be an idiot, but it does give me license to live boldly for Jesus!

Conclusion:

From here tonight until the day our Lord calls us home, we declare together that "to live is Christ".

- Not that we would merely say this with our lips but that it would be true of our lives.

We put on the proper perspective of life as we live all-in live for Jesus and His mission.

We must also maintain the proper perspective of death. Quite literally, it is better than anything here in this world because we get to be in heaven in the presence of the lover of our souls, Christ Jesus.

Death is merely the door we must step through to enter into resurrected life with our resurrected Lord.

Finally, we are reminded that God still has us here for a reason. If you've still got breath in your lungs, God is not done with you! Until you breathe your last, His desire is to use you for His purpose in this world!