

For me to live is Christ

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[0 : 00] Let us now, seeking the help and the guidance of the Lord, turn to the portion of scripture which we read together in Paul's epistle to the Philippians chapter 1.

And reading again verse 21. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. The Apostle Paul, from his prison cell in Rome, writes this epistle or letter to the Church of God, the saints at Philippi, which was a city of Macedonia, or as we know today, Greece.

He tells them of his tender concern and his love for them. And he also reveals to them and describes to them his own feelings and his circumstances.

As he languishes there in prison, awaiting the decision of a judge as to whether he will be released, set free, or put to death.

And as he thinks about these great weighty matters, they bring from his heart this marvellous statement. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

[1 : 23] As you all know, the Apostle Paul at one time was known as Saul of Tarsus. And in these days, Saul, or Paul as we know him now, would not have thought or spoken such words as these.

The first meeting we have with Saul in the scriptures is at the stoning to death of Stephen, the first martyr. And the scriptures say that the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

That Saul was consenting to this death. Although he may not have been actually participating by throwing stones at Stephen, yet he was as guilty as everybody else in the mob.

He was holding the clothes of those who were carrying out such a dreadful act. And after this, as the young church was mourning the death of the first martyr Stephen, Saul was making havoc in the church.

He was entering into the homes of the Christians, carrying them away bound, and having them imprisoned for their faith. You see, to him, this Christian religion was a new cult that had sprung up among the Jewish people.

[2 : 52] And as a servant of God, or so he thought, it was his duty and his mission to wipe it out. And because of this mission that Saul had, he was greatly feared by all the Lord's people.

And it is no wonder that the saintly Ananias, you remember after Paul was met by the Lord on the road to Damascus, the Lord spoke to Ananias and asked him to go and see this man Saul.

And the words he used were, because he prayed. But even this didn't remove the fear from the heart of godly Ananias. And he came and he said, Lord, I have heard by many of this man how much evil he hath done to thy saints in Jerusalem.

And here he has authority from the chief priest to bind all that call on thy name. He was a much feared man among the people of God.

But you know, Saul didn't have a poor or a bad opinion of himself in these days. In fact, he boasted of how great he was in his own self-estimation.

[4 : 06] Listen to what he says. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more circumcise the eighth day of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, and Hebrew of the Hebrews, as touching the law of Pharisee, concerning seal persecuting the church, touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

What need had he of anything else? Who would expect anything more than this from this great man? To our friends, this is the natural heart speaking.

The heart full of sin, untouched by the grace of God. Do you find this kind of heart in yourself?

But the day came, as we already mentioned, when all this changed. The day upon which the Lord Jesus Christ met with Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus.

And he fell down at the feet of Christ. Then seeing his need, seeing his awfulness, seeing his sin, and crying out to the Lord.

[5 : 26] And it was this change in the heart of Saul of Tarshish that brought these words of our text from his soul. For to me to live is Christ.

Christ. The first part of our text. And from that moment on, Paul could say, I am now something which I was not previously.

The grace of God had entered into his heart on that road to Damascus, and he became a new being. He was now transformed from being the persecuting, awful fall of Tarshish to being the loving, diligent, apostle Paul.

He was to become one of the church's most notable stalwarts. Not only then, but through the ages, even to this day. But in these days, when he was Saul of Tarshish, he was persecuting the church. Persecuting the people of God. And thereby, persecuting the Lord himself. In the heart of the carnal man, there is always opposition against the church of Christ, and against Christ himself.

[6 : 49] And Paul himself tells us about this, as he writes to the Romans, it is, In the heart of the carnal man, there is enmity against God. When Christ looked at Saul's life, what did he say to him?

Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? At that time, there was no place in the life or in the heart of Saul for the Lord Jesus Christ.

He was like every other natural being who is still in their sin. They see no need of Christ. They see no form in him or comeliness or beauty that they should desire him.

He is to them as a root out of a dry ground. Is this how you see our glorious Savior this morning? And that was the way he saw him.

But this shattering event that he experienced on the road to Damascus, brought from his heart the cry, but these things that were gained to me, I now count loss for Christ.

[8 : 05] Instead of now seeing himself so great on Hebrew of the Hebrews, persecuting the church, he cries out, I am the chief of sinners.

Oh, wretched man that I am. I am. And would be that God would give to each one of us that same cry from our hearts today as we see our own sin and our own unrighteousness that we would flee to Christ without confession upon our lips.

all who see Christ in this saving way are touched in their hearts as Paul was to see his own sin and depravity, to see and to acknowledge their own need for cleansing, and to see that only the blood of the Lamb of God shed on Calvary's cross can cleanse them from all sin, that there is no other way of salvation but in Christ.

But when Christ met with Saul or Paul as he now is on the road to Damascus, it was not only his estimation of himself and of Christ which changed.

We see that his conception of the whole world is altered. No sooner had this marvellous thing taken place in his life than he wished that everyone should also experience this change that he had experienced himself.

[9 : 46] From going to persecute the church of Christ, he now wished that everyone was a member of this church of life. church of Christ. He knew only too well from his own previous experience and his own life in the world how sin mars the church and how sin mars the soul of every person.

How it is that everyone is under the judgment of God. And another thing that Paul came to realise was that this applied not only to Gentiles but to Jews as well.

You see in the days when he was an Hebrew of the Hebrews as touching the law doing things that were perfectly so in sight he thought that the Jews as they are were the Lord's people and didn't require anything else.

All others were sinners but on this day when his eyes were opened he saw that not only the Gentiles were sinners but that he was a sinner that the Jews were sinners all requiring the cleansing that comes from God alone.

Paul's foremost desire now was that all should hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. He wasn't going to be ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation.

[11 : 16] He said faith cometh by hearing and hearing the word of God. From being a persecutor and an enemy of the church of Christ he now becomes our greatest ambassador.

But you know in another place he says to us but if our gospel be hid it is hid from them that are lost in whom the God of this world hath blinded the eyes of them which believe not lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ whose image of God should shine unto them for we preach not ourselves

but Christ Jesus the Lord.

What a marvelous transformation in this man from persecuting the church of Christ to becoming a fervent servant of the gospel.

It wasn't an easy task that Paul undertook as any of us here who have been touched by the grace of God can understand in some measure or other.

It wasn't an easy thing going from one day persecuting and imprisoning the people of the Lord to the next day preaching and exhorting people to come to Christ recommending to them the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior.

[12 : 44] The change was hard to believe. To him now there was nothing more important than that people should be brought to a knowledge of Christ or in other words that men should be praising God in eternity and only those who praise God on earth will praise him in eternity.

And so it was the vital message of Paul's gospel, the gospel of Christ that people should come to know Christ as Lord and Savior.

And the question for you and me this morning is do we know this Christ? Can we say with all honesty from the bottom of our hearts as we address him my Lord and my God?

Can we say that Christ died for me? That he poured out his soul unto death for me? And friends if we cannot then at this very moment we are lost souls on the road to our lost eternity.

Although Paul gave the preaching of the gospel the highest of priorities he was also aware that there was other works that needed to be done besides this.

[14 : 11] You see there were people in Paul's day who believed that the Lord Jesus Christ was about to come at any moment and so they lay back waiting for him not even doing the ordinary everyday things.

But in spite of all that Paul's great concern is that men should be praising the Lord. Do you remember what he said?

He said how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? And another of the apostles said what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?

No friends and we are alive in a day of materialism when all that seems to count is what we have.

What will it profit us on that great day if we have all the riches and the honours of the world and lose our own soul?

Do we have this desire in our hearts? The desire first of all for our own salvation? The salvation of our loved ones? Indeed the salvation of all men? For this is the desire that comes into the heart as it came into the heart of Paul and he could say to be alive among them is Christ in me loving them drawing them winning them for Christ is that our desire?

[15 : 39] And you know he was saying that and showing that for even when his efforts only earn them ridicule and persecution and suffering and imprisonment but it is when Paul speaks about the church of Christ that we see the change in him really magnified previously we saw that he had a seal for persecuting and doing away with his church and now she is the most loved the most precious thing that is in his life see what he says Christ loved the church and gave himself for it that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word that he might present it to himself a glorious church not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing but that it should be holy and without blemish but you know although this was Paul's view of the church he knew fine that the church on earth would never be perfect that the church on earth would always have faults and blemishes he knew that although the Lord clothed his disciples with the robe of righteousness and renewed and sanctified the spirit of their minds day by day that still pride obstinacy self-will still remained in the carnal fallen nature and he knew that people couldn't be what they should be or what they desire to be indeed what they ought to be and he had many a disappointment in this even amongst his co-workers in the vineyard of God he often had to reprimand them as he looked around he saw he saw in himself and God's people vessels of clay but within these vessels of clay he saw hope the hope that is in faith in Christ the hope that brings eternal life and so he pressed on for he knew as we read that where

God begins the good work he will continue it and fulfil it and accomplish it to the day of Christ I'm sure many of you are acquainted with the writings of the Puritan Thomas Watson and maybe you know about how he described salvation as a golden chain a chain of many golden links and this is what he said he said that the first link in that chain the bottom link is the grace of God in the heart of a sinner and that the top link the uttermost link is the sinner in glory with Christ and in between these links between the first link and the last link were a multitude of other links all the great

doctrines regeneration repentance justification sanctification glorification to name only but a few but the great and the comforting thing that he said about it was this he that has the first link in his hand or in his heart is assured of the last how is it with your child fear today have you got that link are you worrying about all these great doctrines am I justified am I adopted am I being sanctified and all these things are concerned for you are you looking into your own heart to see if you can find there if you are saved and if you are looking into your own heart

I wonder what it is that you expect to find in there that will give you this comfort and this assurance oh friends I tell you now that as you look into your own heart you will find nothing there that will give you comfort or assurance all you will find there is sin upon sin the blackness of sin what we have to remember is this that we come into the world as sinful creatures and that sin remains with us until we are put into the grave and so you say where then can I find this comfort where can I find this assurance oh friends only in Christ you remember what Peter said we believe and we are sure what did he believe and what was he sure of was it that he was of the elect of course not was it that his name was written in heaven no was it that he felt good because he was a follower of Christ definitely not listen to what he said we believe and we are sure that thou art the

Christ the son of the living God and that thou alone hast the words of eternal life this friends is believing in Christ believing that he is God's son believing that he is the saviour of a sinful world and this statement of Peter brought from the Lord that wonderful reply blessed art thou Simon bar Jonah for flesh and blood has not revealed it to you but my father which is in heaven so you see friends flesh and blood will not reveal it to us and look as we may into our own hearts which are only flesh and blood we will not find the answer there nor will we find in the flesh and blood of any other the Lord alone is the one that insight that new life which Paul received on the road to Damascus Saul of Tarsus was not only finding fault with the church in general but all the Lord's people he was persecuting them he was tying them up and imprisoning them finding fault with them but now we find him with his heart full of Christ loving helping praying for them and all friends if we have the grace of God as an experience should we not display these characteristics as well John said we know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren and those who love the brethren do not persecute do not slander do not snipe do not wound those who are brethren in Christ Paul was making clear the truth of this text in his dealings with the world and the dealings with the church but it is as he deals as we see his relationship with

[23 : 05] Christ that the change is most evident who was ever awakened like he was whoever prayed for the church of Christ like he did whoever was so zealous for the church of Christ and for souls as he was and all this brings him to the point where he says I count all these things as loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord for whom I suffered the loss of all things and to count them as dung that I may win Christ and we see in this great man although he makes these great statements we see that he hungers more and more and more for Christ he longs and yearns more and more to be like his Lord and like his Savior Christ was becoming more precious to him every day he was pressing towards the mark of the prize of the high calling of

God in Christ are we is this the path that we are treading he wanted the witness of God's people to be vital to be alive to be warm love one another love even their enemies adore and to worship Christ more and more each day and so we see in the apostle two distinct parts in his life the time of ignorance and self righteousness and unrighteousness and persecution against God to the time when he has changed to become the great apostle and he says I am now crucified with Christ nevertheless I live yet not die but Christ liveth in me as we already said belief in Christ is the belief that

Peter had you remember when Paul and Silas were in the prison at Philippi the jailer cried out what must I do to be saved to which they replied believe on the Lord Jesus Christ believing on him as Christ as the son of God as savior as Peter did no wonder the apostle could say for to me to live is Christ but then he said to die is gain and we would ask who are the people to whom he is referring to whom death will be gain he says himself that the wages of sin is death he says that we all have to appear before the judgment seat of Christ to give account of what we have done in the good or evil Christ said good word for that man though he had never been born so you see there is a division there are those for whom death will be again and there are those for whom death will definitely not be again

Paul believed that he belonged to the church which would be in glory without spot and without blemish he believed that at death he wasn't going to go into the presence of a stranger but to be

with a beloved friend even a beloved brother a co-heir with God the Lord Jesus Christ and this hope that he had would never be put to shame oh yes death is something that we are all afraid of because it is the last enemy it is something that has come into the experience of man because of sin but what the child of God yearns for is what is beyond death oh they are frightened of crossing the Jordan but they long for what is on the other bank to be forever with the Lord Jesus Christ we are at his right hand there are pleasures evermore it is our traveling to be with Christ that is what death is to them but Paul also confesses to having seen a glimpse of what lies ahead even through a glass darkly he says now we see through a glass darkly but then face to face now we know in part but then shall we know I shall be known he said even as I am Paul as you know had learned the trade of a tent maker and he knew that although tents were vital important things in the day and in the place where he lived he knew they wouldn't last forever and he saw himself in this way as a stranger on this earth one who wasn't going to remain here and you remember what he said for we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle or tent or body were to dissolve we have a house not made with hands eternal in the heavens we see his hope as he went on through life whatever met him he had this hope of the glory that awaited we miss and we mourn our fellow

[28 : 31] Christians we miss them from our home we miss them from our fellowship we can look and see places in the church where they sat and we feel sad but sadness no more touches them they no longer mourn sin doesn't bother them their friends never leave them indeed more and more friends join them they wouldn't come back to this world for anything and we know that while they were here with us their greatest desire was to be with Christ which is far better it's our confession with the apostles today for me for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain and he is saying to us this morning ask and ye shall receive seek and ye shall find knock and the door shall be opened unto you and he is stressing the need for us to ask to seek to knock and along with that he gives the assurance that everyone who seeketh everyone who asketh will receive and everyone who seeketh will find and everyone who knocks the door will be opened unto them of course we know that God will not give us everything we ask for you remember what James said you receive not because ye ask amiss but you may consume it on your own life when we pray to

God every petition must be in faith must be according to God's will must be to our right end and God is exhorting us forever in his word to be looking to himself look unto me all ends of the earth and be ye said for I am God and there is none else there is no other God besides me so we must be found looking stead to himself prayerfully to himself in faith taking Stephen as our example of whom we already spoke he was dying under a hail of stones by his persecutors and he looked up steadfastly and he saw heaven opened and he saw the son of man at the right hand of the majesty on high oh friends but again it was for him to die the bible tells us that on that final day many that sleep in the dust of the air shall awake some to everlasting life and some to everlasting contempt all the faithful will come forth out of the tomb glorified to hear

God's covenant of peace and of joy fulfilled to them fulfilled to them then will be the gain which was theirs at death but on the other hand they also would pierce them those who persecuted those who mocked those who derided those who spat upon Christ they will also see they will also rise to see his glory and they will see glory and honour placed upon his faithful servants but oh friends remember this it is not only those who were physically there at Calvary mocking him and spitting upon him and placing crowns of thorn upon his head that are guilty before him on the day of judgment but all to this very day who are wounding him and piercing him with their sins with their rejection and with their persecution of himself and of his people oh yes when you when you mock when you deride when you speak slanderously about

God's people you are mocking you are persecuting Christ as sure as those who were on Calvary hill you see on that final day as here today in this church there will only be two lots of people the Bible refers to them as sheep and goats those who are saved those who are lost those who are alive in Christ those who are dead in trespasses and in sins he will say to those who are his friends come ye blessed of my father inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of the world to all others and there is no in between to all others he will utter the most awful the most terrifying the most dreadful words that human ears can ever hear depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels what a contrast there is between christ treatment of those who are saved and those who will be lost and our great question today is on which side will we be found will we be among those who go to his right and to glory or those who will depart forever to be

an everlasting judgment and damnation oh friends now is the accepted time now is the day of salvation let each one of us strive to be found among those for whom christ prayed when in that great high priestly prayer he said this father i will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where i am that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me for thou lovest me before the foundation of the world oh righteous father the world hath not known thee but i have known thee and these have known that thou hast sent me and i have declared unto them thy name and will declare it that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them and i in them william henrickson in his commentary on the gospel of john makes an illustration of this high priestly prayer of christ and this is how he does it imagine a target or a dartboard and in the middle you have a small circle as we call it a bullseye and then you have another larger circle outside that one and outside that one again there is an even larger one and think of the small circle in the father in respect of himself and then the larger one around the centre one as his request to the father in respect of his immediate disciples and also with reference to himself remembering that that one also encloses the centre one and then there is the large outer circle which is christ requests in respect of the church universal which of course encloses and embraces the other two when you go home study it in john 17 the small circle in the centre verses 1 to 5 the next outer circle verses 6 to 19 and the outer large circle verses 20 to 26 and all we have to remember though Christ prayed for himself he was never never forgot his church his people were always in his prayers and his intercession still at the right hand of God is for them all that each one of us before death eventually finds us would be able to say with the apostle for to me is to live is Christ and to die his gain don't let Satan delude you into thinking oh that day of judgment the day of the resurrection that's something which might be a long way away maybe hundreds or thousands of years away well that may be true but what we each have to remember is this that at the moment death finds us that is the condition in which we will appear before the judgment seat of if Christ were to come into this church for your soul now how would he find you and it is not unknown for people to have been taken from time to eternity while sitting in church would you be able to find in your heart for me to live as

[37 : 34] Christ and to die as gain or another person put it this way in conclusion oh may I daily count my gain and see it all in Christ in life and death in ease or pain in Christ I still am blessed Christ is my life and over death the conquest he has gained for for all for all for all the gifts enjoyed by faith my Christ I love unfaind oh fortunate indeed is the person who this day is able to say in life in death Christ is my gain Christ is my all in all my beloved is mine and I am his can you say it let us pray oh Lord we give thee thanks that thou art still gracious and long suffering and that thou art looking upon us in mercy oh help each one of us this day to seek thee with all our hearts and with all our souls let not the evil one come in as we leave the service and fill our minds and our hearts with the things of the world and the things of tomorrow but may we search thy word for in thy word is thy truth there is the testimony of what

Christ has done for a sinful people may we know the nearness of his presence with us prepare us for our evening act of worship if it is thy will that we should be spared until then but above all keep us praying keep us watching keep us waiting with patience for thyself praying thy kingdom come oh lord we ask thy blessing now upon us as we part one from another and pardon all our sins in Christ's name and for his sake amen God crop of any material man can change or things Pharaoh say earth it as circumstances as we can