

# To Live is Christ, to Die is Gain

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] So thanks so much, Ian. If you've got a Bible, it'd be worth keeping it open at that page as we look through those verses together. And I'll just get this height that I can see over the top of it.

It's just good. It's a kind of challenging thing, I think, for us to face up to. And yet the truth is that the fact is that all of us, year by year, day by day, second by second even, are spending our lives on something.

Winston Churchill, the famous wartime prime minister, once said, it's not enough to have lived. We should be determined to live for something. And I think actually we can probably go further than that and say that, well, all of us are actually living for something, that we all have something that drives us.

We all have something that motivates us. We all have something that we are seeking after. The question is not whether we have that thing or not. Really, the question is, is that the right thing?

Is it what we're seeking after actually something that is worth spending our lives on? Is it something that can bear that weight? Again, I read this recently.

[ 1 : 1 0 ] The author said, we all desire to somehow shape our chaotic days into lives with meaning. I suppose the question is, is what we're living for something that is able, even in our chaotic days, even in the ups and the downs that we go through, is it something that is able to give meaning to life?

What we're living for, what are we spending our lives on? And that's what we're going to try and get to grips with in this passage this morning. That's Paul's kind of focus. And as we've heard the passage read, and as you're sitting here this morning in church, I don't think I'm going to be giving the game away by saying that ultimately, it's only if we're living for Christ that life makes sense.

It's only if we can say, as we've just heard Paul say, for me to live is Christ, to die is gain. It's only if that is our attitude, well, that is the key to a life well lived.

To live is Christ, to die is gain. That's very easy to say, but actually, what does it really mean? What does it look like? Why would we want to live like that? How or what are the results of that?

These are kind of some of the questions we want to look at this morning as we get stuck into these verses. A quick reminder, we started last week this new series in Paul's letter to the Philippians, and we spoke about how the church in Philippi was a really good church.

[ 2 : 3 8 ] It was a church kind of for us to aspire to. And it was a church that Paul, the Apostle Paul, felt a real love and warmth towards as they supported one another, as they were partners in the gospel through thick and thin, we thought.

Well, here in these verses this morning, Paul is encouraging the Philippians as they experience the same challenges that he is going through, also to have the same attitude that he has as they partner together in the gospel.

That attitude really summed up in that headline verse, really, in verse 21 there, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain. Paul wants the Philippian church to grasp that, and we want to grasp that too because Paul is showing us that that is the way, ultimately that that is the only way, to live a life of real meaning and purpose.

But more than that, we'll see as well, also a life that offers joy, a deep joy, whatever situations might come out of us, a joy that only God himself is able to offer.

So let's think what this means for us then as a church together. Remember, we said last week how this is a letter to all the church. This is a letter for something for us to all grow in together.

[ 4 : 00 ] What does it mean for us to be spending our lives for Christ? To live is Christ, to die is gain. What does that really look like? How do we work that out?

And we'll do that in two sections. Firstly, what does that look like and how does it play out in real life? And then secondly, how do we do that? Or why would we do that?

What is the motivation behind this attitude and this life spent for Jesus? So that's our plan this morning too, kind of halves as we look through the verses that you've got there in front of you.

And the first thing we see is what does it look like? To say with Paul, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain. It sounds very grand. It sounds very dramatic, doesn't it?

But how does it actually work itself out in our day-to-day lives? Well, actually we see in this passage, we see this attitude in action for Paul in the first six verses or so.

[ 4 : 58 ] Verses 12 down to 18. Paul speaks about what he is going through and how he is living this out. And we really see it kind of focused on two areas, his situation and his reputation.

First, in terms of his situation, Paul is writing this letter from prison, the letter to the Philippians. He's most likely in a prison in Rome.

Roman prisons were not known for their kind of comfortable, progressive approach to incarceration. Paul is chained up. His freedom has been removed. He can't go where he wants to go.

He can't see who he wants to see. He's in an incredibly difficult situation. And more than that, as we heard reading on, Paul doesn't know what the outcome of his time in prison will be.

And actually his death is a very real possibility. When Paul writes there in verse 20, you see it whether by life or by death. He's not being kind of dramatic or exaggerating there.

[ 5 : 59 ] Those are the facts. That everything Paul writes in this letter, he writes under the cloud of not knowing whether he will ever taste freedom again.

Not only is he in prison because of his faith in Jesus, he may well also end up being killed for his faith in Jesus. And so I think it's fair to say that Paul has serious reason to be downcast, to be negative, to be inward looking.

Probably more reason than most of us will have ever experienced. His situation is bleak, to say the least. But in this situation, what is his primary thought?

What is his primary concern? Well, our verses, as they open in verse 12 and 13, Paul says, I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.

What has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. That is what Paul wants his readers, wants us to know. Still, Paul's focus is how God is at work, how the gospel is moving forward even as he suffers and is imprisoned.

[ 7 : 11 ] How is that happening? How is it advancing the gospel? Well, verse 13, As Paul is in prison, literally chained to kind of one God and then the next as they would go around in a kind of rotation, what's Paul been doing?

Well, clearly he has been speaking to them about the gospel. He has been speaking about Jesus until he can say that either directly or indirectly, everyone, all the gods, have heard about this man so committed to Jesus and what he's done, that he's willing to be imprisoned, he's willing to potentially even die for Jesus.

And so a great picture for us straight away. To be able to say to live is Christ, to die is gain means serving Christ, prioritizing Christ, whatever our situation might be.

Perhaps especially in the hardest times. That's Paul's example. I think it's striking as well that actually as we look at Paul's example of what this looks like to live this out, that we have such a strong example of this in-house as well in our own church.

I'm keen not to kind of embarrass them, but as we think of the Gibsons with Stuart in the hospital, with Eileen who has been visiting Stuart for the past three months now, I don't think that there are many doctors or physios or potential roommates left who haven't heard from Stuart about his faith, who don't know that that man is a Christian and a man of prayer as you speak with Stuart and with Eileen, that what other people have heard about the gospel and their prayers for others in that hospital is right at the front of their mind.

[ 9 : 01 ] I think that's a great example of this. There is an incredibly difficult situation. There is an uncertain situation, a painful situation that nobody expected and that nobody wanted, but one in which still we see that example of looking to share Christ, looking to serve and encourage the church, remaining a priority even in the toughest times.

As we partner with those guys, that means we continue to pray for them and support them as they continue to put Christ first. That's another great example that we have right in our own congregation.

But actually, I think for all of us, it's not too difficult to kind of substitute in our own situations, our own challenges, even though they might seem a lot more mundane, even though they might seem a lot more common, but we can substitute in what are the things that are filling our lives and our minds at the moment.

It's very easy to recognize. You know, often work is full or we're in a particularly hectic stage of life or a young family feels like constant busyness or there is change on the horizon.

We're not quite sure what's next. Any number of situations, any number of challenges that we face. And the point here is not to say that those things aren't true. You know, no, you're not really busy.

[ 10 : 23 ] Just as Paul isn't saying, well, no, I'm not really in prison. No, the point for us to think about is how do we serve Christ even in the midst of those situations?

Now, how could we write that, you know, I want you to know what is happening to me is serving to advance the gospel. Is that our first thought? Both the sharing of the gospel with others, Christ is proclaimed, Paul says, verse 18, and also that the building up, the encouragement, the helping grow the faith of others within the church, your progress and joy in the faith, as Paul writes in verse 25.

In some ways, this is kind of the rub. This is where we come down to. How do we make sure that looking to share the gospel with people and looking to encourage one another, build up the church, how do we make sure that those are not always the things that kind of get put on hold or get kind of shuffled down the list when challenge and busyness comes?

That actually serving Christ and his people isn't always the thing we just don't have time for or can't quite fit in at the moment. But instead, they're actively living for Christ and his church, for the spread of the gospel and the building up of his people, that that is our constant priority in every season of life.

And now, it's really important to say that doesn't mean it always looks the same throughout every season of life and it doesn't happen in different ways. There are different times and seasons where we engage in that in different ways. But actually, we do need to face up to this challenge, I think, this morning.

[ 12 : 01 ] That to be able to say to live is Christ means that whatever situation we're in, whatever stage of life, we're able to say, look how this is advancing the gospel. Because we recognize that still God is at work and Christ is still our number one priority.

Even in the hardest, the darkest, the busiest of times, that living for Christ remains our goal in every situation. So there we go.

That's the first thing Paul speaks about his situation, that incredible model of a man committed to saying to live is Christ in every situation. But he also shows us here that to live is Christ, to die is gain, also means serving Christ over our reputation as well.

And we see this really in verse 15 onwards. While Paul has been in prison, some other people are kind of sprung up and started preaching about Christ. And some of them, Paul says, is really kind of positive motivation.

They've been trying to kind of pick up the baton, trying to keep on partnering with Paul even while he's in prison. But others, Paul says in verse 17, are doing this out of selfish ambition.

[ 13 : 10 ] The idea is people thinking, I suppose, well, Paul was a pretty big deal. He seemed pretty important. Maybe I can take some of that reputation for myself.

You know, I can make myself look good at his expense. I can kind of put him down so that I can be in the limelight or take some of his airtime. And again, what's Paul's response then to this?

It would be easier, I suppose, to feel hurt, wouldn't it? It would be easy to say, well, you know, stop them doing that. It would be easy to say, look, I'm still here. Look at me. What does Paul say?

Verse 18, what then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

A great deal of this preaching might have been intentionally taking away from Paul's reputation. It might have been causing people to have questions about Paul.

[ 14 : 07 ] It is absolutely not kind of bigging him up and saying good things about him. What does Paul say? Paul says, I don't care. I don't care what people think of me or say about me because what I do care about and what is happening is that people are hearing about Jesus.

Christ is proclaimed. To live for Christ means that his work, it is more important than my reputation. And I think, again, as we think about ourselves, this is, you know, not too difficult to apply to ourselves, is it, that trusting in Jesus, speaking about the gospel, is not always the best thing for your reputation.

To build your life on Jesus, God come to earth crucified and risen again, making forgiveness possible, accepting that forgiveness as the whole basis of our life and our hope and our future.

That is not your average kind of chat at work or the school gates, is it? Even more so, and increasingly so, to be people who hold to the Bible's teaching on marriage, on sex, on male and female.

The Bible's position there is certainly not the majority position. It puts you as an outsider, which incidentally it would have also done in the kind of first century Roman context in which it was written.

[ 15 : 33 ] But holding a different view so often comes with a risk to reputation. What will people say about me? Perhaps especially in a culture like ours, which so often speaks about tolerance and inclusion, but so often doesn't extend that to people who disagree with them.

To live for Christ is to put your reputation on the line. But actually Paul makes clear here that it means putting Jesus, putting his word, putting living for him above our reputation, above our inbuilt concern for what people might think of us.

And perhaps it's not just what people outside the church think, but also what people inside the church think as well, or don't think about our reputation. Perhaps we are hard at work and stuff within the church.

Perhaps we are serving in all sorts of different ways, spending time with various different people, putting in hard work, often doing the kind of unnoticed stuff. And it seems that perhaps we don't always get the thanks that we feel we perhaps deserve.

You know, as a church, we absolutely want to be a grateful church who do notice and do appreciate all the good things that people do. And yet when that gets missed, and at times it will, it does challenge us in revealing our motivation.

[ 16 : 57 ] Even when people don't see us, can we still rejoice that Christ is proclaimed, that the church is built up, that the faith of others in the gospel grows, that that is enough for us, that that is what satisfies us, that that is where our hope is in, that it is Christ's glory and not our own, which is our primary motivation.

To live is Christ and to die is gain. What does it look like to live that out? It looks different, as we've said, for all of us. But we see from Paul, it means sharing the gospel. It means building up the church.

It means living that out and having that as our priority in every situation. And no matter what anyone might say, whatever it does to our reputation. And so there we go.

Paul has, that's the first half kind of done. Paul has painted this picture for us through his example of what it looks like to spend our lives for Christ. Let's move on now.

And we're going to think of how, why even we would do that. Because let's be honest, and I want to be really clear that we understand this and I get this, that what we've just been speaking about and what Paul has been laying out in this passage is incredibly challenging.

[ 18 : 17 ] It is incredibly difficult. It might even seem to you sitting here this morning to be incredibly foolish or perhaps obsessive or inflexible or over the top.

What Paul is writing about here and picturing for us, it goes against so much of what we're conditioned to strive after. It goes against so much of what comes naturally to us, which so often has our kind of autonomy or following our dreams or being who we want to be, our comfort, our success.

Those things so naturally come into the center. And yet we're saying, or Paul is saying, instead to be serving Christ with everything, in every situation, having him as the center.

Perhaps this morning you're a Christian and you think, well, yeah, I know that's kind of what I'm supposed to be doing, but how? Because it's just really difficult to do and it is difficult. Or perhaps you're not a Christian, in which case your question might well be, well, why?

Why would I ever want to do that? It all just seems a bit full on. And so we're going to move on. We're going to look at that kind of how and that why question together because really the answer is the same.

[ 19 : 34 ] And Paul gives us this answer in the second half of our passage, verses 19 down to 26. And I think we could summarize that. We could summarize Paul's answer in this.

That this phrase that we've been looking at, this kind of key headline, verse 21, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain. Paul's answer really to the how question, the why question, is that this is not just an aspiration.

This is actually a truth. This isn't just the way that we are aiming to live. It's actually what we are promised is the case if we accept the gospel.

That actually what we're promised in Jesus, the eternal home with God that he makes possible if we trust in him, is better than anything that this world and this life can give us.

To live is Christ. To die is gain. That's not something for us to try and kind of live up to. It is a truth that is possible and a fact because of Jesus.

[ 20 : 41 ] And Paul says this in this section in a few different ways. Verse 19, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the spirit of Jesus Christ, this will turn out for my deliverance.

He's not speaking there about being delivered from prison. He goes on. He's just about to go on in verse 20 and say he doesn't know whether he will have life or death. He doesn't know whether he'll get out. Paul's speaking there about the eternal deliverance, that salvation that God has promised in Jesus, which he knows is his.

He knows cannot be taken away whatever happens in this life. Oh, again, verse 23, I'm 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. Again, what does Paul say is best? Actually, he says what is best will be once he's gone from this life and can enjoy eternity with Christ.

and yet he is willing to stick around to build up, to help, to encourage, to give his life for Jesus and his church. That's an incredible thing to say.

[ 21 : 52 ] It probably sounds strange to our ears, doesn't it? But actually, one of the central truths of Christianity, of the Bible, of the gospel, which we can so easily forget, is that truth that the best is still to come.

That actually, for Christians, for those who've put their trust in Jesus, for those who've accepted their need of forgiveness, that only Jesus through the cross can offer, the truth is that the best is still to come.

For Christians, the kind of popular sentiment, tweets, whatever it is of living your best life now, well, the fact is actually that's impossible because what God has promised when we are with him for eternity is just so good that we cannot comprehend it.

We can't fully understand it, but that we can be certain of it and that it will dwarf any experience that we have here on this life.

It will be so much better than even the very best thing we've experienced. It will be like having kind of Mount Everest next to the Lammur hills or these kind of tiny foothills. What is to come is so much better by far.

[ 23 : 03 ] For some people, maybe you're sitting here this morning and that might feel like a bit of a surprise and your kind of response to that might be to say, wow, even better than this because things are going pretty well for me. I've got a lot of good stuff going on.

For a lot of people, I'm sure that feels like a huge relief to be able to say, well, thank goodness that this isn't it, that there is something more because this life is hard and I'm struggling and I'm suffering.

Christianity promises that certain hope that nothing else can, that hope that nothing can take away, that stretches even beyond death, that the best is still to come.

I can't remember who I first heard point this out, someone far smarter than me. They were saying that actually that sentence, to live is Christ, to die is gain, if we put anything there instead of Christ, well, then suddenly that sentence makes no sense at all.

If for me to live is money, then to die isn't gain, it's to lose everything. If for me to live is comfort or happiness, then to die isn't gain, it's the very thing that we will spend our lives trying to keep at arm's length but which will inevitably find us.

[ 24 : 18 ] If for me to live is family, then to die is not gain but it's to be separated from that which means most to us. If for me to live is my health, well then to die is to lose.

It is only if we can say that for me to live is Christ, that he is our priority, that he is what we are spending our lives for, that he is who we're trusting in, his forgiveness, his promises, his gospel.

It's only if we can say that to live is Christ that we can finish that sentence by saying and to die is gain. that's a truth we are promised in the gospel because Jesus promises us that through what he has done, if we trust in him, if we ask for that forgiveness, that we will be with him forever.

And it's holding on to that truth which is both the how and the why of giving our whole lives here and now for Jesus. It's holding on to that truth which is the foundation of living as Paul is encouraging us to, of having that same attitude that Paul has and that he wants the church to share of giving everything for Christ, of serving him with all that we have in every situation even in the midst of the hardest times.

It's as Paul looks forward, it's as he dwells on how good what is to come is, how actually for the Christian that even death, the thing that our world fears the most, tries to blank out, tries to run from as fast as possible that actually even to die is gain as it means being with Christ, being with God our creator forever.

[ 26 : 03 ] That is what makes all the difference, that is what allows us to live for Christ now. See how this way of thinking doesn't make Paul passive does it? It doesn't mean he's in any way kind of morbid or just kind of waiting for that day to come, he's not just killing time.

No, instead it motivates him, he says, to be all the more to work for God's glory here and now. Whatever his situation, whatever the cost to his reputation to spend everything for Christ, confident that he can sacrificially serve him through sharing the gospel and building up Christians whatever way he can and that that will be a life well spent, the best way to spend life with the best still to come.

Verse 23 to the end, 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.

Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus because of my coming to you again.

And the same is true for us. The more we realize that being with Christ is better, the more we're able to serve him here. The more we look forward to what is to come, the more we can strive together for the gospel here and now.

[ 27 : 29 ] There's a great old hymn which says, by and by, when I look on his face, I wish I'd given him more. That idea is when we see Christ, when we come to the end, when we know just fully what is in store for us, that we have wished we could have done even more for him here and now.

It's as we think forward and think about how the best is still to come, all that we have promised in Jesus because of the forgiveness he offers, that we're motivated to give him all that we have here and now.

Last week in those introductory verses, Paul twice spoke about the day of Jesus Christ, that day Jesus will return. Again, this week his focus is on being with Christ. as we keep on looking, keep on reminding each other that the best is yet to come, that we can be all the more committed in serving Jesus now and putting into practice the to live is Christ and to die is gain attitude that Paul models and Paul wants us to follow him in as we partner together in the gospel.

And then the final thing to say, we'll close with this, but the final note so important to highlight that kind of rings through this passage and through this letter as a whole is that when we grasp this and when we truly dwell on this, that we're able to do this with joy, with real joy.

Paul is clear that even as he sits in a prison cell uncertain of his future, being run down, afflicted by other people, verse 18, Christ is proclaimed and in that I rejoice.

[ 29 : 05 ] Yes, and I will rejoice, he goes on to say, knowing that deliverance, that salvation, that certainty that is his in Christ. And how is he wanting to encourage then the church?

Well, verse 25, I know I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith. There is just joy shot throughout this passage, throughout this letter, for Paul, for the Philippian church, for us, to live is Christ, to die is gain.

And yes, that is incredibly challenging. Yes, that does mean going through suffering. No, that is not naive or unaware of the difficulties of our world and of real life, quite the opposite, we've seen that.

But it does still mean, it does still promise joy. It is the one way through life which can mean rejoicing even in sorrow, even in the face of death itself, because it means, as Churchill said, we have not just lived, but we've lived for something, and that that is something of eternal significance, promising eternal security, eternal perfection, and eternal joy, but a joy that begins here and now for all those who put their lives into Jesus' hands.

Let's pray together. Amen.