

LIVING = CHRIST

PHILIPPIANS 1:12-21

07/22/07

Someone has said that **“Philosophy is a quest for a comprehensive understanding of human existence.”** Human beings have always sought to explain the meaning of life. We try to answer questions such as **“Who am I? Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going?”** Sometimes philosophers and scholars have summed up the meaning of life with short sayings.

Here are just a few:

“I think, therefore, I am.” ~ *Descartes*

“To forget one's purpose is the commonest form of stupidity.” ~ *Nietzsche*

“To me, if life boils down to one thing, it's movement. To live is to keep moving.”

~ *Jerry Seinfeld*

“When it's all over, it's not who you were. It's whether you made a difference.”

“You will never live if you are looking for the meaning of life.” ~ *Albert Camus*

“What is the meaning of life? To be happy and useful.” ~ *The Dalai Lama*

“The purpose of life is a life of purpose.”

“The person lives most beautifully who does not reflect upon existence”

“Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself.”

“To live is to think.”

“Do you want to know who you are? Don't ask. Act! Action will delineate and define you.” ~ *Thomas Jefferson*

“To live is not breathing; it is action.” ~ *Rousseau*

The apostle Paul said, **“For to me, to live is Christ.”** Any statement made about the meaning of life that leaves Christ out or that does not put Him at the center is a lie. Jesus said, **“I am the way, the truth and the life.”** He who is life itself is our reason for living. **“To live is Christ.”** This morning we will reflect on what that means and how we can live it out. Paul, in his state of imprisonment, had been thinking about his life and about death. He wrote down this profound statement, under the inspiration of God, for the benefit of the Philippian believers and for us today. Paul didn't come up with this saying on his own. It was revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ was the center of his life, his life was wrapped up in Christ. Christ was his reason for living. Christ was everything to him.

If we are going to understand this phrase, “**To live is Christ**”, we need to first of all understand who Christ is, do we not? To say “**For to me to live is Christ**”, without knowing who Christ is, is meaningless and empty. So then, who is Christ? If I called on you right now in front of the congregation and I asked you to tell us who Christ is, could you do it? Of course we are not talking right now about what He means to you subjectively – who He is to you. We first need to know objectively who He is, in and of Himself. In order to do that, we have to go to Scripture. The Hebrew word for Christ is *mashiyach*, from which we get the word **Messiah**. It has the same meaning as the Greek word for “**Christ**” which is *christos*. The word simply means “**anointed**”. This word is derived from another Greek word, *chrio*, which means “**to anoint.**” “**To anoint**” is to put oil on the head or body, and was a common practice in the ancient East. There were common and sacred types of anointing. The sacred use of oil was for consecrating things or persons to God. In the Old Testament the sacrificial furniture in the Temple was anointed and thus set apart as holy unto God. The oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit, and as applied to things gave them a ceremonial sacredness.

Prophets, priests and kings in the Old Testament were anointed with oil, consecrating them to their offices. Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the anointed one who was set apart unto the three offices of Prophet, Priest and King of his people. Fausset’s Bible Dictionary says, “**He is the Center of all prophecy, the Antitype of all priesthood, and the Source and End of all kingship.**” He was anointed with the Holy Spirit from the womb, then at his baptism. He is the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. The Messiah was the instrument by whom God’s kingdom was to be established in Israel and in the world. So, in saying, “**To me, to live is Christ**”, Paul was making a statement about God’s kingdom and God’s covenant. Christ is the mediator of God’s covenant with his people. Christ is the King over God’s kingdom.

He is the Priest who offered up himself as a sacrifice to atone for the sins of God's kingdom people. He is the Prophet who instructs us as to the way to enter the kingdom and the way to live as subjects in this kingdom.

Jesus is the sole Mediator of this kingdom – the only Mediator between God and man. He is the only way to God. Through Christ alone a person has life. This is so in several ways. Jesus Christ is the Creator, the Sustainer and the Redeemer of human life. Colossians says, **“For by Him all things were created.”** Hebrews says that He upholds, **“all things by the word of His power.”** The angel in Luke said, **“For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”** Jesus Christ is both God and man – one person with two natures. He is fully divine and fully human. Through his perfect life and atoning death He saved his people from their sins. Through Him alone we have access to God and are accepted by God. By nature we are all dead in trespasses and sins. Through him alone can we be made alive and have a new nature imparted to us.

Before a person can say, **“To me to live is Christ”**, he or she must first be able to say, **“Christ made me alive.”** Can you say that? Has Christ made you alive through a new birth brought about by the Holy Spirit? If so, then you can say, **“To me to live is Christ, because Christ gave me life.”** But sadly, many people stop there and do not move forward to actually live for Christ. If Christ has given you life, then are you truly living your life for Christ? Are you finding your fulfillment in Him? Paul is saying that the joy of life is wrapped up in the presence and enjoyment and service of Jesus. Life finds its total meaning in Christ.

Christ *alone* can give meaning and purpose and fulfillment to life. Real life is found in knowing, loving, serving, glorifying, enjoying, communing, and having

fellowship with Jesus Christ. Loving, serving, glorifying and enjoying Christ is the real deal. What are you living for? Fill in the blank: For me to live is _____. For some people, “For me to live is money or success.” Others would say, “For me to live is pleasure or having fun.” Some would say, “For me to live is church.” Or, “For me to live is helping the poor, or feeding the hungry.” Or, “For me to live is to learn theology.” Still others would say, “For me to live is my husband or my wife. Or, my fiancé. Or, my boyfriend or my girlfriend.” Some would say, “For me to live is my family – my children and grandchildren.” Some might say, “For me to live is my career.” Others would say, “For me to live is recreation or my hobby.” For example, “For me to live is my car, my home, my garden, or food, or playing golf, or watching sports, or viewing movies, etc., etc.” Right now, many would say, “For me to live is Harry Potter.”

Of course there is nothing wrong with enjoying any of the things that I just mentioned – unless one of them becomes the thing you love supremely or the thing you live for. When you live for something else other than Christ, you will always be disappointed because everything else is subject to change. Money will run out, your body will wear out, your friends will let you down and your loved ones will pass away. But the Bible says that Jesus is **"THE SAME YESTERDAY, TODAY AND FOREVER."** He alone is eternal and unchangeable. He alone is worthy of supreme devotion and love and worship.

Ligon Duncan is the senior pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Jackson, MS. Listen to what he said about this: **“You understand that the Apostle Paul is not saying that nothing else in life is to be enjoyed by Christians but Christ, but what he is saying is this: that as we enjoy all the gifts of God, they are subordinated to and related to our prime delight in, love for, satisfaction in, fulfillment in, love of**

Jesus Christ. And if any of those good things that we have compete with Him for first place, what have we become? Idolaters...worshiping the blessing rather than the Bless-er...worshiping the lesser blessing rather than the One greater blessing. And the Apostle Paul is saying, ‘From every delight that God has given me in this life, whether it is a cup of cool, refreshing water, or that seven-course meal; or friends who stick with me through thick and thin, and love me despite my sin and the way I let them down, or whether it’s seeing a child come to faith in Christ, or an enemy of the gospel come to love the Savior; or watching a sunset, or contemplating that God flung the stars into space—all of those things are subsumed under and related to this one overarching thing: that for me, to live is Christ—so that if you took all of my ability to see and enjoy those things away, you could not take Christ away from me. But if you take Christ away from me, none of those other things matter.’”

Is that the way you look at life? Of course none of us can say that we are ever as devoted to Christ as we ought to be. No one, not even Paul, could say that he lived 100% for Christ 100% of the time! But the truth is that we ought strive to do so with all of our being! If **“to live is Christ”**, then we ought to live completely for Christ! And to the degree that we as believers are doing that, we will experience the thrill and joy of life as no one else can. Jesus said, **“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”** Do you believe that? Then why are you living for other things or putting anything ahead of Christ? Notice that Paul said, **“For me, to live is Christ.”** Paul was not saying that this is something unique to him as an apostle only. This is not something only for super-saints, but is for all Christians. I believe Paul said it this way so that when we repeat this verse that word me is very personal.

But just how do we live this out on a practical level? It must certainly be true on a philosophical level for all of us. We must first have the right understanding and thinking about life being centered in and grounded in Christ. He alone gives meaning and purpose. He alone gives us physical, spiritual and eternal life. He is our life. As Colossians 3:4 speaks of, **“Christ who is our life.”** But day to day, how are we to live so that Christ is our life? Galatians 2:20 says, **“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.”** In order to live this out in the real world, we must reckon that we are crucified with Christ, that Christ lives in us and that our lives are now lived by faith. To say **“To me to live is Christ”** is to live a life of faith in Him at all turns. It is to trust Him, not only with eternity, but with every trial and every difficulty along the way. It is to have confidence in Him, looking to Him for strength, and trusting in his promises and in his grace. Without faith, it is impossible to please Him.

Secondly, to live as if Christ is our life is to make our **“central aim in life to know, glorify, and enjoy Christ.”** (Duncan) It is to wake up every morning with one overriding goal for the day – to know Christ and honor Christ in all that you do. On your list of priorities for the day, Christ is not only at the top of the list, but He is at the top of each and every item on the list. To say **“for me to live is Christ”** is to say that He is the one whom I worship above all else. As the first commandment tells us, we therefore have no other gods but Him. It is to refuse to let anything come before Him or anything to influence us to turn away from Him or disobey Him. To live unto Christ we must be ready for battle against the world, the flesh and the devil. Every day we are on this earth, we are going to be tempted to fill in the blank with something other than Christ. So, in order to live this out, we must be ready each day to resist temptation to replace Christ with something else – even with other good things.

Let's move on to another practical way in which we can live out the idea of **“for me to live is Christ”**. If this is your desire, then you will want to know as much of Christ as you can possibly know. When you love a person, you want to know everything you can about them. If you love Christ, then you will want to know who He is. You will want to understand his person. You will want to understand as much as possible about his two natures and how they relate to each other. You'll want to know as much as you can about the Trinity and the relationship of Christ to the Father and the Spirit. You will want to study his life and ministry and teaching. You will dig into the Scriptures to know all about his atoning sacrifice and glorious resurrection. You will seek to learn about his current ministry at the right hand of the Father and his future return in power and glory. You will want to find a church where you hear much about Christ in every sermon. Why did you come to church this morning? Did you come looking for Christ, listening to hear about Him in the lessons and in the sermon? If not, then why did you come?

If for you **“to live is Christ”**, then you will live in his word. You will look for Him on every page. In John 5:39 Jesus said, **“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.”** On the road to Emmaus, Christ opened the Scriptures up to those two disciples. What did He teach them? Luke 24:27 says, **“And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.”** When you read Genesis look for Christ. When you read the Psalms, the Prophets and the historical writings, you will find Christ on every page if you look carefully. Have you found Christ in the book of Proverbs yet? Go back and re-read Proverbs until you find Him! If we only read Scripture for nice moral principles, we are acting no differently than the adherents of any other religion in the world.

Another practical way in which we live out this idea of **“for me to live is Christ”**, is to seek to become more like Christ. Last week when we were in a motel in Atlanta, we watched part of a show called **“The Next Best Thing”**. On this show men and women are competing to give the best impersonation of their favorite celebrity. Someone did Lucille Ball. A man sang a song as Frank Sinatra and was pretty convincing. There were actually two guys impersonating Elvis. Elvis impersonators are a dime a dozen. But one of the guys on the show is serious. He said he has loved Elvis for many years and dedicated his life to becoming like him. This guy could have been Elvis’ clone at age 30. He looked exactly like him. He sang exactly like him and moved like him. A person for whom **“to live is Christ”** is not satisfied just knowing about Him or admiring Him for a distance. Such a person desires to be conformed to His image. This is often a painful process. The Elvis impersonator had to spend hours in the make up room in order to get the right look. You and I will have to spend hours in prayer and the word. And we will have to endure the pruning work of the Holy Spirit. We will have to be humbled and made to feel our weakness and rely only on His grace. But for the believer for whom **“to live is Christ”**, it is all worth it – just to become more like Him. You know, Gandhi considered himself to be an admirer of Christ. He once said, **“I like your Christ, I do not like you Christians. You Christians are so unlike your Christ.”** If for you **“to live is Christ”**, then you will live to prove Gandhi wrong.

Another way in which we can practically live out this principle, **“for me to live is Christ”**, is to seek to make Christ known to as many people as possible. The apostle Paul, before his conversion, traveled land and sea to arrest Christians and put them into prison. But after he met Christ on the road to Damascus, he became even more zealous to travel land and sea to proclaim the good news of Christ. Since for Paul to live was

Christ, he wanted others to know the one who had given him life. Paul cared little about what happened to him. His passion was the glory of Christ and the advance of the gospel in the world. His obsession was to proclaim the one who came to give life and give it more abundantly. Is that your obsession as well? Have you tasted of the goodness and greatness and grace of Christ? Will you keep this to yourself? Think about it – why do we send missionaries and why do we do evangelism? Because *to live is Christ*.

Finally, if for **“you to live is Christ”**, then as Paul said, **“to die is gain.”** Those who are of the world will try to live for something and death form them is the spoiler. If a person lives for money, then death separates them from that money. If a person lives for pleasure, then death separates them from that pleasure. If someone lives for another person – a special relationship, then death will separate them from that person. Death is an enemy to all who do not know Christ. It is an even greater enemy than anyone can imagine because death brings the unsaved person before the throne of Christ who will consign them to everlasting torments. For them to die is great loss – eternal loss. But for the believer, to die is gain. If **“to live is Christ”**, then dying will only usher us into the presence of Christ. The Scottish Presbyterian theologian Samuel Rutherford once said that if his Lord was not in heaven, he wouldn't want to go there. Give him all the benefits of glory and then just take away Christ, and he says, **“I wouldn't want to be there; because my first and my central joy and delight in this life is Christ. That's who I want above everything else.”**

We will talk more about Paul's view of death and his desire to depart and be with Christ. I'll close with a quote from the commentator Albert Barnes who said, **“No believer, when he comes to die, will regret that he has lived unto Christ; but how many, alas! regret that this has not been the aim and purpose of their souls?”**