

TO DIE IS GAIN

Philippians 1:21

INTRODUCTION

We are going to sing the song “My Hope Is in You” at the end of our service. There is a stanza in this song with these words:

*My hope is in You, Lord
All the day long I won't be shaken by drought or storm
A peace that passes understanding is my song
And I sing my hope is in You, Lord*

Whatever tempest, trial, drought, storm, disappointment, anguish, or pain lies before us, our hope is not a wishful thinking type of hope but a certain hope in Christ based on His promise to us in the Word.

Hebrews 2:14-15; 1 Cor 15:25-26

Death brings sobriety. Death brings reflection.
Death annihilates pretense, the trivial, ...

The statistics on death are as follows ... one out of one die.

Our text speaks to a very deep need in our lives today.

READ Phil 1:18-24

Proposition: 3 Perspectives that enable Paul to say, “**to die is gain**”

- I. A **Personal** perspective
- II. A **Temporal** perspective
- III. An **Eternal perspective**

Beloved, **So That:** You will live well now.
and **So That:** You will die well when your time comes.

You have heard the expression – “the elephant in the room” referring to obvious discussion point or person everyone has in mind, but is afraid to bring up. Well, it is not an elephant in the room this morning. It is the most beautiful swan ever created on the table this morning, my beloved Margie ... with her swan song still singing in my heart and in the heart of so many more.

Thank you for indulging me as this “not mighty/not wise” preaches through this powerful text.

1st Perspective that enables Paul to say, “**to die is gain**”...

I. A Personal Perspective

Point – Paul makes it personal. To Paul, this is very very personal. Paul’s treatment of salvation is usually universal and corporate.

→ Not individual and personal.

Paul doesn’t focus on self in his writings, except to highlight his sins that Christ forgave. This is unique.

Proof – “^{21a}**For to me,**”

As good students of the word, we ask what is the “**For**” for?

“Therefore” brings the application of what preceded.

“**For**” highlights the foundation of what preceded.

go back to preceding verses → “¹⁸**What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice.**”

Philippians is a “Prison Epistle”

“**What then?**” → So what? Either way. It’s a win-win. Christ will be exalted in either case. God will be glorified. Paul will grow.

“**in this I rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice**” – The true Christian is characterized by joy.

Illustration – Watching my Margie’s video montage this morning, (my intent is to watch at least once every day for the rest of my life), I saw the joy inexpressible that radiated from my beloved’s face through her tempest and trails.

Of course there are times of pressure and heartache when our joy is muted. Grief is right and appropriate.

Illustration – Jesus himself wept.

There are some griefs which seem to rip our hearts apart.

There’s not a Christian who doesn’t need to pray at different times in his life, “Restore to me the joy of my salvation.” Paul himself wasn’t always able to live up to his determination to rejoice.

“¹⁹For I know that this shall turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,”

Human help – **“your prayers”**

Divine help – **“the Spirit of Jesus Christ”**

“deliverance” –the Greek word σωτηρία – delivered, rescued

MacArthur → He says he thinks the English word ‘deliverance’ may be the best, most comprehensive, and the most clarifying word to explain God’s gracious powerful work in our lives.

Psa 91 – three times the Psalmist talks about God as the Deliverer who delivers/rescues His people.

“²⁰according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I shall not be put to shame in anything, but *that* with all boldness, Christ shall even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.”

“earnest expectation and hope” – the imagery is literally the stretching of the neck; of the head forward

“**boldness**” – clear, with conviction → Courage!

George Muller – *“If our circumstances find us in God, then we shall find God in our circumstances.”*

- if you are walking with God when the unexpected comes upon you, God is right there with you by His grace and mercy

“**Christ shall even now, as always, be exalted in my body**” – Christ will be exalted/magnified in Paul’s body, regardless of the outcome – “**whether by life or by death**” → **Win-Win!**

People have questioned whether Paul is speaking of his immediate deliverance and vindication at his upcoming trial or his ultimate deliverance and vindication in glory?

... Yes! → “**whether by life or by death**” → Win-Win!!

Before **Jim Elliot** went to the Auca Indians he said: *“I don’t know what the future holds. But I know who holds the future.”*

Illustration – **George Atley** was a missionary in the Congo a century ago working with the Central African Mission. One day, he was attacked by a group of hostile men. He was carrying a fully loaded, 10-chamber rifle. He had the choice of defending himself and shooting down some of his attackers. But he knew what this might do to the work of the gospel in that area. His body was later found in a stream. His rifle was near him, with its 10 chambers all still loaded and unfired. It was clear **George Atley** had chosen sacrifice. He had courage so that Christ was exalted in his body, whether by life or by death, in this case, death.

Illustration - when I was reading Scripture to Margie in her final days, I would personalize it. I would replace ‘those in Christ’ with ‘Margie’.

Application – What is your personal application of the truth we read in Philippians? What is your personal application of all Scripture?

2nd Perspective that enables Paul to say, “**to die is gain**”...

II. A Temporal Perspective

Point – Complete, total, singular focus on Christ.

First stanza of *In Christ Alone* –

*In Christ alone my hope is found;
He is my light, my strength, my song;
This cornerstone, this solid ground,
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My comforter, my all in all—
Here in the love of Christ I stand*

Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones – “*There are certain demands I make of life; there are certain things I am looking for. I am looking for peace and joy, I am looking for happiness. I am looking that Christ would completely satisfy me in every respect.*”

Proof – “^{21b}**to live is Christ**”

“**to live**” – Phil 2:5 – Paul talks about having the same attitude/mind of Christ

- also Phil 3:8-9; 4:4; 4:13; 2 Cor 5:15; Gal 2:20

Sören Kierkegaard, 19th century Danish existential philosopher – highly doubtful he was a believer but he did write one thing that captures the essence of this quite well in his work Purity of the Heart – “*Purity of heart is to will one thing.*” – and one thing only.

Christ is my all in all. Every demand I make of life is more than fully satisfied in Christ.

This is what Paul means by saying “**to live is Christ.**”

- When our reaction to things that happen and all the demands of our life, being, and personality are fully satisfied and filled in Christ.

This is the very essence of being a Christian .
The thing that makes a Christian is Christ. Christ is always central.
He is everything to Paul. Is He everything to you?

Paul knew about suffering → **Acts 9:16** – “I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.”

Turn to: **2 Cor 4:8-11; 11:23-37**

- that is the message of Christianity
- it is not God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life
- it is amazing → when persecution is strong, it kicks out any easy believism because it is a supernatural act of salvation, it is a gift from God
- Christ is exalted in the body of His believers

Professor of Preaching, Haddon Robinson – *“Before there can be the crown there must be the cross. Before there can be the glory, there is the agony. Before you can be lifted up, there is the kneeling down. Before you can gain the prize, there is the agony of the race. Before the Triumph, there is the War. Before glorification, there is blood, sweat, and tears.”*

Illustration – The example of my Margie. When she was diagnosed with advanced breast cancer, my beloved immediately took a huge step up in terms of **“to live is Christ”** ... And just Christ! As time went on, all the other things that would compete with Christ faded away.

Death is the great equalizer ... for all men and women.
Death is the great cleanser... for the believer.

This is a whole other level of sanctification. It is one thing for the believer to take away the sinful things that compete with Christ. It is an entirely new and different level to take away, in the sense of distraction, the godly pursuit or the pursuit of godly things that run the risk of becoming idols.

Fill in the blank: To live is _____

➔ If you put any other word in this first phrase, the second phrase doesn't make any sense. Death becomes loss ...!

Did not Jesus also teach that man cannot serve two masters?

You cannot serve God and mammon.

You cannot serve Christ and wealth.

You cannot serve Christ and fame.

You cannot serve Christ and fitness.

You cannot serve Christ and career.

You cannot serve Christ and children.

You cannot serve Christ and spouse ... no matter how wonderful

... no matter how amazing ... how precious

... no matter how much you may rightly cherish.

This is my present personal application.

Illustration – Greg Bahnsen was a presuppositional apologist, heir apparent to Cornelius Van Til. He preached this passage the Sunday before the Lord took him home. He picked this one because he knew he would very likely not make it through his operation on that Tuesday. He was right. God took him home two days later.

Dr. Bahnsen brought out the very personal application of God's sovereignty in his salvation. Before the foundation of the world God knew him, loved him, and chose him... **Personally!**

Application – Now, for you and me ... as believers

... our problem is not "**to live is Christ**" ...

Our problem is ... "**to live is Christ** ... plus something else

...that is the challenge.

God has us here on earth. God wants us to be in the world – to be salt and light in this world.

You will live life confidently when you hold onto Christ tightly.

And hold onto everything else loosely, including life itself.

3rd Perspective that enables Paul to say, “**to die is gain**”...

III. An Eternal Perspective

Point – If you are engaged to be married, do you want to be engaged your whole life? Sure. Engagement is great, but how much better is marriage??!! That is the picture here. The church is described as the bride of Christ. God is the groom. We love to be “engaged” right now. The will of God is being done right now here on earth and that is wonderful! How much more wonderful when our faith becomes sight and that is fully realized at the marriage supper of the Lord takes place?! That is the point that Paul brings out here.

Illustration – I remember when my Margie and I were engaged, I was secretly thinking, please Lord, don’t come back until we get married ... → I did repent ☺

Illustration – “To be or not to be. That is the question.”
Hamlet didn’t know the answer.
Paul knew the answer. My beloved Margie knew the answer.
I know the answer.
You know the answer ... if you belong to Christ ...

Proof – “^{21c}**and to die is gain.**”

The Bible calls Death “the last enemy” (1 Cor 15:26).

Rev 2:11; **20:6**, 14; 21:8 – “the second death has no power”

- the point is that there is a first death – this is the one with the statistic that one out of one will die
- but there is a second death, the eternal death, when Satan and all the demons and the unsaved of all time are cast into the lake of fire
- if Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior, that second death has no power

“**gain**” → gateway to the glories of Heaven

For Paul ... for every believer – “²³**to depart and be with Christ**”

You lose death and gain eternal life.

You lose this fallen world, but you gain the glories of heaven.

You lose a prison and you gain a palace. (John 14)

You lose the life of never beholding Christ and you gain a permanent sight of him.

You temporarily lose the companionship of some friends in Christ to regain the companionship of those who have died in Christ.

You lose your sin and gain sinlessness.

You lose perversion for eternal purity.

You lose your doubts and gain assurance.

You lose anxiety and pain and gain joy and pleasure.

You lose sickness and gain eternal health.

You lose weariness, heartache and disappointment and gain the fulfillment of the love of all the saints, angels, and Jesus himself.

⑨ You lose the flickering candle and walk into the dawn of an endless day.

Paul's gain AND Christ's gain – the Gospel will march forward with Paul's fearless and bold witness!

- the application and explanation of the word “**For**” in v. 19.
- **Christ will be exalted** in Paul's body ... **whether in life or death**.

Illustration– We called my beloved Margie's service, “**A Celebration of Life**,” which it was. Even before the service I told George, Robb, Gary, and Chris that the service was really “**A Celebration of Life**” AND “**A Celebration of Death**.”

→ For us ... for the Christian ... it is, in some ways, even more of a **Celebration of Death** (v. 23 – “very much better”) than it was a **Celebration of Life**.

→ This is what “**to die is gain**” means ... to me ... to you.

This celebration was personal for my Margie – many of you heard her say that her cancer was “*a trial handed to me on a silver platter*.” The foundation is that Christ was, is, and will be exalted. And my beloved is now exalting him completely, perfectly, and wonderfully. **Forever and ever and forever more**.

Psa 116:15 – “Precious in the sight of the LORD Is the death of His godly ones.”

Prov 10:7a – “The memory of the righteous is a blessing,”

Application – Is this personal for you?

John Donne was a 16th and 17th century English poet and pastor in England. His final sermon was “Death's Duel.” After, he posed for a portrait in his funeral shroud and placed the shroud by his bed to meditate upon it until his death.

Donne's most famous poem – For Whom the Bell Tolls

→ “*Ask not for whom the bell tolls. It tolls for thee.*”

- understand that your day is coming, and the question is ‘are you ready’?
- the great tragedy is not when a beautiful, vivacious, beloved and cherished 46 year old wife and mother dies prematurely
- the great tragedy is when the young or the old is not ready - when anyone dies in their sin; when they are not in Christ.

CONCLUSION

Illustration – The story is told of a rich man who had a lovely garden. The gardener who tended it took great pains to make the estate a paradise. One morning, he went into the garden to inspect his favorite flowers. He discovered in horror that one of his choice beauties had been cut from its stem. Soon he saw that the most magnificent flowers from each bed were missing. He hurried to his fellow employees filled with anxiety and anger and demanded to know who stole his treasures.

One of his helpers replied, “The owner came into his garden this morning, picked those flowers himself, and took them into his house. He wanted to enjoy their beauty.” The gardener then realized that he had no reason to be concerned. It is perfectly right for the master to pick some of his own prize blossoms.