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Sermon Notes

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To Live Is Christ, To Die Is Gain

Philippians 1:21

I. Paul's Argument with Himself: To Live or To Die?

A. Hamlet's Depression

Act 3, Scene 1: The most famous soliloquy in Shakespeare, Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark, ruminates over the question of suicide

To be, or not to be: that is the question:

*Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep;
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;
To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come*

Hamlet wrestling with a simple question: should I keep on living or not? What repels him from life? “The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” and “A thousand natural shocks”... the terrible ups and downs of mortal life with all its pain and disappointment and suffering

What repels him from death? “To die, to sleep, perchance to dream... ay there's the rub, for in that sleep of death what dreams may come?” He is repelled from death by the possibility of judgment day, of wrath and of hell

Either way, he is gloomy, depressed, morose and suicidal... repulsed by life with all its suffering, repulsed by death with all its potential for eternal judgment

In Philippians 1, we find the Apostle Paul doing the exact same ruminating... pondering between life and death, and whether he would like to live or die. But how different is the Apostle Paul's attitude

NOT repulsed by life with all its suffering, NOT repulsed by death with all its potential for judgment and wrath

NOT AT ALL

His is a joyful choice, between two delightful options

B. Paul's Joy

1. Attracted by life, despite all its suffering
2. Attracted more by death, because of its eternal reward

vs. 21-26 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; 24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.

Life... death...

Vs. 21 "To live is Christ"

Vs. 21 "To die is gain"

Vs. 22 "If I am to go on living in the body..."

Vs. 23 "I desire to depart and be with Christ"

Vs. 24 "It is more necessary for you that I remain in the body"

No morbid introspection and dark depression here... I would be delighted to live, and I would be delighted to die

C. Man Proposes, God Disposes

Vs. 22-23 "Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two"

Vs. 27 "Whatever happens..."

In the end, Paul doesn't know for sure what will happen... because the day of our death is completely in the hands of a sovereign God

1. Paul's rumination is only theoretical
2. He has no power whatsoever to affect the span of his life one cubit
3. God has determined that day and that hour according to His own purposes

Ecclesiastes 8:8 No man has power over the wind to contain it; so no one has power over the day of his death.

4. YET Paul ruminates anyway, because he wants the Philippians to understand his way of thinking... his JOY in life and his JOY in death

D. Christianity the Only Truly Healthy View of Life and Death

1. Islam: grim submission to an absolute tyrant, Allah, who promises you nothing and will deal with you as he sees fit... fatalism is rampant in Islam
2. Buddhism: mortal life is nothing but suffering, and the only salvation is freedom from the body and freedom from suffering... physical life is meaningless and to be escaped from
3. Hinduism: endless cycles of reincarnation, trying to achieve ultimate emptiness in Nirvana, becoming like a single drop of water melted into an endless sea
4. Atheism: Nietzsche declared that “God is dead”... and ended up by taking his own life

Friedrich Nietzsche: “When one does away with oneself one does the most estimable thing possible: one thereby almost deserves to live.”

“The thought of suicide has helped me through many a restless night.”

5. Hedonistic Materialism: “Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.” “He who dies with the most toys wins.” No... he who dies with the most toys dies, and after that faces judgment

All of these views have a perverted perspective on both life and death

Only Biblical Christianity can embrace life with overwhelming joy: despite all “The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” and “A thousand natural shocks”.. .

Only Biblical Christianity can embrace death, judgment day, and eternity with joy and expectancy!

Here alone is true health in a sad, sick, suicidal world

II. To Live Is Christ

A. Christ is our Physical Life

1. We cannot take a single breath without Christ

Acts 17:28 'For in him we live and move and have our being.'

Colossians 1:16-17 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

“To live is Christ” = my physical body is Christ’s for He made it and holds it together

2. Christ owns our bodies and our days on earth

1 Corinthians 6:13-15 The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. 14 By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. 15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself?

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

“To live is Christ” = my physical body is Christ’s for He purchased it with His blood and owns it for His service

3. All of our days are measured out for His glory

Psalms 139:16 All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

- a. not too few days
- b. not too many days
- c. we keep living at His will, for His purposes, for His glory

James 4:15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."

Paul was facing His own mortality unafraid, for He knew that He would not die until Christ said so

Illus. John Paton in the tree: “I am immortal until God is finished with me.”

4. The circumstances of our physical lives are chosen by Christ, and He gives the power needed for each

Philippians 4:12-13 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

In every way, Christ was Paul’s physical life

“To live is Christ” = Christ created my physical body, holds it together moment by moment, gives me every day of physical life, and He bought my physical body with His blood... I live every moment in the body at His command... He chooses my physical circumstances and gives me everything I need for physical life

5. The moment Paul trusted Christ, his earthly life was forfeited for Christ's glory:

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

B. Christ is our Spiritual Life

1. God sees us "In Christ"

Philippians 1:1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons

Physically, their address is "at Philippi"... spiritually, their address is "in Christ"... that's where God sees them

Same at the end of the epistle

Philippians 4:21 Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus.

- God chose us "in Christ" before the foundation of the world
- God will give us every spiritual blessing in Christ
- In Christ we may approach God with freedom and confidence
- In Christ we may call God Abba Father
- In Christ all our sins are forgiven
- In Christ we are new creations
- In Christ we are dead to sin and alive to God

Illus. In Christ means for us spiritually what being "in the ark" meant during the flood of Noah... inside the ark meant salvation from drowning physically in the wrath of God, in the floodwaters of the earth; so also being in Christ means salvation from drowning eternally in the wrath of God, in the floodwaters of the lake of fire.

Illus. John's Gospel has two main purposes in teaching: 1) to teach that eternal life comes through faith that Jesus is God in the flesh; 2) to teach what the nature of that life is

- Eternal life in Christ is possible only because He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1)
- Eternal life in Christ is like an abundance of high quality wine at a wedding banquet (John 2)
- Eternal life in Christ is like being born again (John 3)

- Eternal life in Christ is like having a personal spring of water inside of you, from which you can drink whenever you thirst (John 4)
- Eternal life in Christ is like being able to walk when you were paralyzed (John 5)
- Eternal life in Christ is like eating bread from heaven every time you are hungry (John 6)
- Eternal life in Christ is like having rivers of living water flowing from inside you (John 7)
- Eternal life in Christ is like having a constantly brilliant light by which you can walk through this dark world (John 8)
- Eternal life in Christ is like being born blind, never able to see color, then all of a sudden, your eyes are opened and your soul is ravished by a beauty you could never have described, but now can't live without (John 9)
- Eternal life in Christ is like having a good shepherd who will guide you into perfect pasture and who will lay down His life to guarantee your eternal safety (John 10)
- Eternal life in Christ is resurrection from the grave when there was no other hope (John 11)
- Eternal life in Christ is being willing to die like a seed, knowing full well that a harvest of blessing will come from our suffering (John 12)
- Eternal life in Christ is like having our filthy feet washed by a perfectly humble King, then being given the power to wash each other's dirty feet like He did (John 13)
- Eternal life in Christ is traveling a journey with Christ to a perfect mansion where we will live with God forever (John 14)
- Eternal life in Christ is like being a branch on a vine, in which the life-giving and fruit-bearing sap never stops flowing through us (John 15)
- Eternal life in Christ is like terrible birth pains that give way to a permanent joy that no one will be able to steal from you (John 16)
- Eternal life in Christ is having a great High Priest who prays for you, and who will make you as perfectly one as the Father and the Son are one (John 17)
- Eternal life in Christ is having God take on a body, be condemned, spat upon, scorned, rejected, mocked, flogged, and crucified for your sins (John 18-19)
- Eternal life in Christ is the resurrection from the dead with a perfect body that will never be subject to death again (John 20)
- Eternal life in Christ is having Christ make breakfast for your hungry body, speak peace to your troubled soul about your sins, and give you a work of eternal significance to do for the rest of your life on earth (John 21)

When Paul says "For me, to live is Christ", he meant all this and much more

When Paul says "For me, to live is Christ" means that spiritual life comes from Christ and from no other source

Paul was dead in transgressions and sins before he met Christ on the Road to Damascus

Paul was dead in pride, dead in selfishness, dead in covetousness, dead in faithlessness, dead in blasphemy, dead in murderous thoughts and hatred... dead even while he lived, following an energetic, ambitious, Jewish career in the Pharisaic path

“To live is Christ” meant that his old life was dead to him forever... he was eternally made alive

“To live is Christ” meant that his true life was hidden forever with Christ in God... kept safe in heaven

C. Christ is our Purpose in Life

As soon as Paul trusted Christ the Savior for the forgiveness of His sins, He knelt in His heart before Christ the King and said “Command me, my King, and I will obey!”

It meant the rest of his physical life on earth was to be used up and spent for Christ’s purposes

1. Personal growth in holiness = “Christlikeness”

- a. that Paul would stop living for himself and his own glory
- b. that Paul would stop relying on himself to achieve his purposes
- c. that Paul would imitate Christ in His pattern for life, character, and behavior

“To live is Christ” = Every moment, I want to become like you, my Lord... I want to imitate you in everything; Even more, I want to be WITH you in everything; I want to know you completely

This is especially true in terms of suffering... Lord, teach me how to die... to die to myself every day, and to live only for your will

2. Personal suffering in His image and pattern

3:10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death

None of us knows how to die... Paul wanted daily lessons from the master, Jesus Christ... to be conformed to his death

Amazingly, in his attitude in these verses, the Apostle Paul is the MOST like Christ

Willing to forgo his personal enjoyment of heaven for the benefits of God’s people

Vs. 23-26 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; 24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.

This is Paul just like Jesus... who departed the throne of glory to come suffer the cross for us

3. Personal fruitfulness by His power for His glory

- a. Paul's continued life in Christ is for a purpose
- b. God wastes nothing!! Christ wastes nothing
- c. every painful event of Paul's life was measured out to accomplish God's end...
FRUIT

vs. 22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me.

Fruit: progress of the gospel (vs. 12... by being poured out for the gospel; 2:17)

Fruit: progress of the Philippians in the gospel (vs. 26)

Ultimate purpose: THAT CHRIST BE EXALTED

Vs. 20 I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

God is willing to keep Paul suffering in chains if it would bring the most glory to His beloved Son, Jesus Christ

Even more, Paul is willing and delighted to do that... if His suffering and living would exalt Christ more, let it come

If His departure from earth would bring Christ more glory, let it be... nothing else means anything

Summary: To live is Christ means Christ gave me my physical life to begin with, sustains it every moment, controls its every circumstance... Christ is also my spiritual life, and God sees me only in Christ; therefore Christ is my purpose in life: to grow in holiness in the pattern of Christ, to learn how to suffer and die in the pattern of Christ, and to exist for the fruit of the glory of Christ

III. To Die Is Gain

A. Shocking Statement

1. "To live is Christ" ... Christ is the pinnacle, what could be "gain" compared to that
2. If the sentence read "For me to live is Christ, and to die is a vacation home in the mountains" it would be blasphemous... or "For me to live is Christ and to die is a paradise filled with all kinds of sensual pleasures"
3. The only way this thought honors God is that the "gain" is absolutely God-centered

For me, to live is Christ, and to die is MORE CHRIST

That is the greatest desire of Paul's heart... to get the treasure hidden in the field, the pearl of great price... the reward can be nothing less than Christ Himself, in a far greater and better way

B. Paul's Enticing Glimpses

1. On the Road to Damascus

Acts 26:13 About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions.

2. Caught up to third heaven

2 Corinthians 12:2-4 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know-- God knows. 3 And I know that this man-- whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows-- 4 was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell.

Paul had had a taste of the supernatural glory, and he wanted it forever

C. Christ's Deepest Longing Has Become Paul's Deepest Longing

1. Christ's Deepest Longing for Paul

John 17:24 "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

Christ wanted to give Paul that inheritance so much He died to make it happen!!

2. Paul's Deepest Longing

Philippians 3:8-11 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. 10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Christ's longing for Paul began before the foundation of the world

Paul's deepest longing was set the moment he trusted Christ on the Road to Damascus

D. What Gain? Freedom from Imperfection

1. Present state:

- a. imperfect personally through constant abiding sin

Romans 7:18-25 *I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 19 For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do-- this I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. 21 So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. 22 For in my inner being I delight in God's law; 23 but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God-- through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

b. imperfect in our relationship with Christ

1 Corinthians 13:12 *For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.*

“Now we see” = we have some knowledge of Christ, we are no longer blind... BUT

“we see in a mirror dimly” = not the direct glory of God, but dim reflections of it in His creation and in the prophetic word

Illus. On December 4, 2002, there was a total eclipse viewable in Australia... the Australian Society of Ophthalmologists made it very clear that there was no safe way to view the eclipse directly without risking blindness... they advocated the “Pinhole Method”:

This is the simplest and safest way to view the Sun. Take a piece of card and use a pin to pierce a small hole. Facing away from the Sun hold the card up so that light passes through the hole on to a wall or other flat surface. An image of the Sun should be visible. You can use this method to see the changing shape of a partial solar eclipse.

Although this method is the safest, it does have the disadvantage of producing a faint, small image. The size of the image is roughly equal to the distance between the pinhole and the image, divided by 100. The farther the distance between the pinhole and image, the fainter the image will be.

So is also the image we have of Christ in physical revelation and in the Scriptures... it is merely “seeing through a glass darkly”... but someday, we will see “face to face”

Also: downpayment versus full inheritance:

2 Corinthians 5:4-6 *For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. 5 Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. 6 Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord.*

Illus.: Monthly stipend from Bill Gates’s fortune... Gates has three children and his present net worth is approximately 35 billion dollars... if he and his wife were to die and he were to leave all his money evenly divided among his three children (ages 1 to 7 years), they would each get about \$12 billion. Usually these estates are held in trust until they come to adulthood and into their inheritance... and they are usually given a monthly stipend to live off... the Holy Spirit is our monthly stipend of experience of Christ until we come into our full inheritance... the stipend itself proves we are heirs of a much larger fortune

2. Future gain

a. personal perfection

Philippians 3:12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

Hebrews 12:22-24 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

This is part of the “gain” that death will bring... perfection in mind, emotions, spirit... eventually perfection in body as well:

Philippians 3:20-21 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

b. perfect fellowship with God

1 Corinthians 13:12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

1 John 3:2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

Revelation 21:1-4 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

E. Physical Death the Only Way

1 Corinthians 15:50 I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

1. Only by leaving behind the mortal bodies can we survive seeing Christ in all His glory
2. Our mortal bodies would be incinerated by Christ's full glory... the corruption in us would cry out against us and we would perish

3. For Paul, death has become the great doorway into eternal joy and perfect glory

For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

IV. Application: What About “For You...”?

FOR ME, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

A. Do You Have Paul’s Attitude Toward Life?

1. Do you acknowledge that your physical life is Christ’s to do with as He pleases?

George Mueller: To one who asked him the secret of his service he said:

"There was a day when I died, *utterly died*;" died to George Mueller, his opinions, preferences, tastes and will-- died to the world, its approval or censure-- died to the approval or blame even of my brethren and friends-- and since then I have studied only to show myself 'approved unto God."

What day was that? Galatians 2:20 tells us it happened once for all time when he trusted Christ:

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

But from then on, it was up to George Mueller to keep “considering himself dead” to selfish interests... it happened once for all at conversion, but it was made effective daily by reckoning on Mueller’s part:

Romans 6:11-12 Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.

2. Do you understand that your spiritual life is Christ, in Christ, only in Christ, all of Christ?

3. Do you embrace your calling to live a life worthy of the gospel while you are still on earth?

To grow into Christlike character and holiness

To learn how to die like Christ did... to lay yourself down for Christ’s glory

To be fruitful for Christ’s reputation... to lead lost people to Christ, to spend yourself on behalf of the poor and needy, to be fervent in prayer, to be willing to suffer that Christ’s Kingdom will advance both inside you and around the world?

B. Do You Have Paul’s Attitude Toward Death?

1. I have seen some Christians face death with dignity, courage, and peaceful expectancy

2. I have seen other Christians face death with fear, undue terror, and dishonoring faithlessness

PREPARE TODAY to embrace your own death with joy as Paul did

3. I have seen some Christians live life timidly because they loved their lives on earth too much and feared death too much
4. I have seen some Christians so cherish Christ and His promises that they lived every moment ready to die if He called them home...

Adoniram Judson, missionary to Burma: originally sailed with his wife to India, but was rejected by the government there; suffered greatly from the deaths of his first two wives, a son and a daughter; waited six years for his first convert, saw years of labor go up in smoke when his translation of the Bible into Burmese was destroyed in a fire before it was finished; arrested as a British spy, was in prison for twenty-one months and sentenced to be executed, but his life was spared. When he arrived in Burma in 1813, there was not a single Christian in the whole land; when he died 38 years later, the government listed over 210,000 Christians!!

"I am not tired of my work, neither am I tired of the world; yet when Christ calls me home, I shall go with the gladness of a boy bounding away from school."