

# Christ: The Only Way to Live and Die

*Spring Conference 2021*

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Well, it's great to be here. We looked forward to this for a long time and my wife, Mary, it's her first time to be with you and we're very grateful for that. All of our children are now married so she can come with me all the time, and that's a huge blessing for me but I'm sure she'll enjoy you very much.

I'm going to be reading tonight from Philippians and I was just sitting in the pew thinking, you know, Paul was very grateful to the Philippians because they prayed for him every day and they sent him gifts from time to time to show their love to him and he actually implies that the gifts were treasured by him but the fact that they came from them made it all the more valuable. When you get something from somebody you love, it's the more valuable and that's, may I say it humbly, a little bit the way I feel about this church. You've been so loving and prayerful and giving, there's something very special about this body of people and even as I hear now how you've received a new pastor and Pastor Bradley will be giving his farewell sermon very soon to you and this transition is going so wonderfully smoothly and what a blessing. You're really a blessed people and I'm grateful for that and grateful for how you've blessed us. You've been a tremendous encouragement and not just to me but to the whole faculty and the staff and we're just really grateful for you.

So in a way I feel like I'm coming home. I feel relaxed coming here. I know several of you, hopefully will get to know a few more of you, and you've been such good friends and I hope we have a wonderful weekend. I can't think of a better theme to bring you than Solus Christus. I mean, that's what life is all about so I hope that you'll marinate in this theme over the weekend, and my prayer is that as we move through tonight and tomorrow and the Lord's Day, that this theme, Solus Christus, will just ring in your ears. Christ alone. Christ alone. Christ alone. This is my life, that it will escalate and that by the end on Lord's Day evening when I hope to preach about our life with Christ in glory as his bride forever and ever where all sin is walled out and all good is walled in, I'm hoping that, that's my prayer that by Sunday evening you will just cry out, "Lord Jesus, come quickly. We want to be with thee forever." Forever. He is what it's all about. He is what the Christian life is all about. Not you. Not me. It's all him.

So we want to begin that this evening by looking with you at a few verses in Philippians 1 where Paul is talking to the Philippians who are very concerned about him because he's

in prison now and he's telling them, "Don't worry about me. God will take care of me." In fact, isn't it amazing that Philippians is often called the epistle of joy. "Rejoice and again I say to you, rejoice," Paul says while he's in prison. This is amazing. I mean, after all, Paul was the apostle among the Gentiles. The New Testament church is spreading everywhere. If there's ever a time Paul was needed, it was now. Can you imagine for the Apostle Paul not being able to preach anywhere while he's in prison? I've often said, you know, when you're constrained to bring the gospel, when the call of God is upon you, you'd almost rather die than not preach and yet Paul is full of rejoicing, bowing under God's sovereignty and telling the Philippians, "Don't worry about me. God's going to actually use my imprisonment, I'm already talking to the guards in the palace and they're already being impacted, so everything is going to be okay and my life is Christ."

So Paul sets before us in this chapter a model, an incredible model of how to live. How to live. And so that's where we want to begin tonight with this theme of Solus Christus, "The Only Way to Live and to Die." I mean, I want to just focus with you on verse 21, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Let's read 12 through 26.

12 But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me [that's his imprisonment now] have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; 13 So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; 14 And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. 15 Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: 16 The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: 17 But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. 18 What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. 19 For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, 20 According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. 21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not [I know not]. 23 For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: 24 Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. 25 And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith; 26 That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again.

May God bless the reading of his sacred word.

Let's have a brief prayer.

*Lord God, bless this conference, bless this first address, rend the heavens and come down and commune with us, we pray, and let our vital religion bear a stamp tonight, tomorrow, the Lord's Day of reality, of sweet, genuine, experiential communion with thee, the living Triune God. And may we as John Owen said, more and more come to know thee in each of thy divine persons, and say with Samuel Rutherford, I know not which divine person I love the most but this I know, I love each of them and I love them all and I need, need especially the Lord Jesus Christ to be my life. So Lord, as we focus on thy dear Son whom thou dost delight to honor, we pray that in these six addresses and sermons, that thou will do valiantly, that the unsaved would be saved, that the saved would be matured, that the matured would be more and more conformed to the image of thy dear Son. So be with us now, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, for me to live Christ, to die gain. The Greek doesn't have that helping verb that we have to use in English to make the sentence make sense. This is a grand and glorious text and a fitting place to begin when we talk about what it means to live Solus Christus. This is a summary of Paul's life. This is like a panorama that he puts over his life, "This is who I am. This is my identity. For me to live Christ, that's it, to die gain." That's his testimony and it's interesting that Charles Spurgeon said that a preacher ought to preach often on the great texts of the Bible, the big, simple, profound texts of the Bible, and certainly we have one of those before us tonight. You can hardly think of a bigger text, a more simple text, a more profound text. This is the only way to live and the only way to die, Christ. Live Christ and you will die gain.

I see, I'm happy to see boys and girls here tonight. Let me say to you, children, that, you see, Jesus is either real and he's the Savior, the one you need, or he's not real, he's a hoax and he's not Lord of all. Well, you know and we know that he is real, that he's the Son of God and the Son of Man, the sinless Son of Man, the only Savior there is, and if he's the real Savior, then he's worth everything. He's worth your entire life from the time you're four years old or five years old all the way if you live to be 100. You have to give your whole life to him. That's the only way to live, the only way to die. That's what Paul's saying here.

So he's saying to the Philippians as he starts to reminisce, you notice that, on his life beginning already in verse 12 about his imprisonment and so, and then he goes on to say, "Well, I know that all this will turn to my salvation through your prayer. I know you're going to pray for me and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ and Christ will be magnified through all my sufferings whether it be by life or by death," verse 20. Then, it seems to me, that he pauses in his writing. Now he's waxing nostalgic. He's thinking about his life. "Who am I?" It's almost as if he sets down his quill or whatever he was writing with and he just reminisces, "How can I summarize my whole life, my future eternity? How can I summarize it in just a few words?" He picks up the quill again, "For me to live Christ, to die gain because I'm in Christ."

So I want to speak to you tonight about just two thoughts under this theme the only way to live and to die. The first is how Christ can be our life. The second is how death can be our gain. How Christ can be our life, how death can be our gain.

So how can Christ be your life, your whole life, the essence of who you are? Well, I'm going to give you four words tonight simple to remember, I hope, how Christ can be your life. The first word is link. Link. We are linked with Christ when Christ is our life. Theologians have a fancy word for that, they call it sacred mystical union with Christ, or justification in Christ. But what it really means is that we're linked with him, we have a living, vital, saving relationship with Jesus. Today you young people, you're connected with so many friends, aren't you, so many people relationships you have through your cellphone and other social media. It's phenomenal. And you ask somebody, you ask a teenager today, "Do you know So-and-so?" And they say, "Yeah, I'm connected with him. I'm connected with him."

You see, that's what a Christian feels, connected with Jesus Christ and that, of course, had not always been the case for the Apostle Paul. Originally, as you know, he was a Pharisee, persecuted those who were connected with Jesus Christ, and prior to his conversion, if you said, "Paul, what's your life, your whole life, say it in one word, Paul?" He would have said, "My life is Moses. I glory in the law. I glory in legalism, in man-made righteousness. I'm a Pharisee of the Pharisees, after all." But on the way to Damascus it all changed, didn't it? Acts 9, the light shines from heaven. Paul falls to the earth trembling, astonished, blinded, conquered by God. And his friends bring him to Damascus, for three days he can't see, can't eat, can't even drink, could only pray, and there in the street called Straight, the Holy Spirit shows Paul who he really is in the mirror of the holy law of God. And now if you stick that piece of paper in front of Paul again and you say, "Paul, for me to live...? Put it in one word, Paul, what's your life?" I think he would have said, "Sin. I'm a sinner. I'm a lost sinner. Before God that's who I am. I'm a stranger to God, a stranger to grace, a lost sinner before a holy righteous God." His uncircumcised heart was humbled on Straight Street and there Paul accepts the punishment of his iniquity. But there also when he's brought to a wit's end of himself, when his own righteousness becomes unrighteousness and he's cut off of all that he is, there the Holy Spirit leads this persecuting Pharisee to Jesus Christ and the scales fall from his eyes. He says later, "It pleased God to reveal his Son in me that I might preach him among the heathen." His Creator became his Redeemer, and his life from then on end is linked, connected to Jesus Christ by what we call justifying faith.

And you see, justifying faith means that Jesus does everything for you that you can't do for yourself so that you can be saved by putting your trust, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, in him alone. Faith has but one object which is Jesus and really we can summarize everything that we cannot do to save ourselves and that Jesus must do for us, shall we ever be saved, into two things. One thing is what we call his passive suffering, his passive obedience. The word "passive" comes from the word "paseo" in Latin which means "passion" which means "suffering." He suffered, he died, he paid the price of sin so that he would drink the dregs of the cup of his Father's wrath for sinners who put their trust in him down to the very bottom, so that our righteousness could exclusively be in him and not in ourselves.

So we call that his passive obedience, but the second thing he had to do for us for us to be saved is not just wipe away our sins. If you picture this behind me here is just filled with sin, that this wall was entirely black instead of white where all the little specks of sin that darkened it, and that was entirely white-washed through the obedience and death of Jesus Christ, that's wonderful, our sins are wiped away but it still doesn't give us a right to eternal life. For that, you see, we need a perfect obedience to the law of God and you know, boys and girls, what the law demands, right? Love. Love. "You shall love the Lord your God above all, love your neighbor as yourself." And you see, by nature we never do that, we never love God above all. We always love ourselves more than anyone else. We never love our neighbor as ourselves. But you see, what Jesus came to do, he didn't only come to suffer and die for sinners but he also came to live for 33 years in this world to produce a perfect obedience to the law of God. So every tick of a clock, tick, tick, tick, tick, for 33 years in his thoughts, in his words, in his actions, he loved God above all, he loved his neighbor as himself. We call that his active obedience. He actively obeys the law so that when a sinner believes in him alone for salvation, his double obedience, his passive obedience to wipe away our sin, his active obedience to obey the law on our behalf is our salvation so that our sins are wiped away and we receive a right to eternal life and we are saved forever and ever, forever linked to him.

Now this is very important to understand, that this double obedience, as John Calvin put it, is our total salvation. Not 99% and you have to do 1%. Total salvation lies in the double obedience of Christ. When the Holy Spirit influences you such that you cannot but put all your trust in this Savior, you are saved forever and you're linked forever to Jesus Christ. I want to make that crystal clear by one more little illustration for you children. There was a boy named Tom, he was about 10 years old, and he made himself a great boat, a nice little boat, and he went down to the river every day and he'd run along the riverbank and he'd pull that boat on a string and the boat would just kind of bob up and down on the little rivulets of water and Tom got a lot of satisfaction, a lot of fun with this boat. One day, he's pulling the boat, it's a windy day, pulling the boat and the wind ripped the string out of Tom's hand and the boat sailed away. Tom was very sad. A few days later, he's walking in the downtown area and he sees his boat in the shop window of a store. He walks in and he says to the owner, he says, "Ah, that's my boat. I want my boat back." And the owner said, "Well, that will be \$20." And Tom says, "No, no, no, you don't understand, sir. This is my boat." And the shop owner said, "You don't understand, young man, I paid for that boat. That boat belongs to me. If you want it, you can buy it for \$20." So Tom runs home, he gets the \$20, he brings it back, he gives it to the shop owner and he walks away with the boat and he feels so close to the boat he's talking to the boat when he walks out of the store and he says, "Twice I've owned you. First I made you, then I bought you."

And you see, that's what it means to be saved. Jesus first made us but we ripped ourselves out of his hand, boys and girls, and we sailed away, we said, "We're going to live our own life. For me to live is self." But God comes and through the double obedience of Jesus and through the Holy Spirit working in our heart showing us our sin and drawing and driving us to Jesus to find our salvation in him, you see, we get saved in him and Jesus then says, "Not just for \$20 but I gave my blood for you. First I made you and then

I bought you with my precious blood to save you and to hold you fast forever connected to me." He's our righteousness. He's our life because we are linked to Jesus.

Now number 2. To live Christ is to not only be linked to him but to have life in him. To have life in him. Now we call that a fancy word, sanctification. When you are justified, you will also be sanctified and sanctification simply means to be made holy. To be made holy. The Dutch word for sanctification is heilig maken, holy making. That's nice and simply, too bad we don't have that in English but it's too late to change the word. Holy making. And you see, when we're in Christ and we get to know Christ, the influence of Christ by the Holy Spirit in us makes us more holy so that the aim of our daily life, the intentional aim of our daily life is that we would be increasingly conformed to Christ, made more holy in Christ, and to that end, you see, we fall more and more in love with Christ and we want to know him more and more. Sometimes as Christians we feel like we're not making very good progress, feel our own internal sin, indwelling sin, we feel what Paul felt in Romans 7, don't we, "The evil that I would not do I find myself doing, the good that I would do I find myself not doing. O wretched man that I am!" But you see, if Christ is increasing inside of you and you are decreasing, you are growing in grace whether you realize it or not. "He must increase, I must decrease," said John the Baptist. That's the essence of sanctification and when your life is Christ, then your whole life, you see, there's ups and downs, of course, but your whole life is a trajectory of him increasing and you decreasing.

"For me to live Christ." Not just linked to him but I find my life in him, I get to know him better and better in his person, in his nature, in his offices. I learn to love him as my teaching prophet, as my sacrificial interceding priest, as my ruling and guiding king. When I lay my head on the pillow at night and everything has pretty much gone my way that day but I've had no communion with Jesus, it's been an empty day. It's been a bad day. But when I lay my head on my pillow at night and I've had some troubles that day, some disappointments, trials, but I've had genuine communion with Jesus, it's been a good day because communion with him, life in him, fellowship, sanctifying fellowship with Jesus, that's what life is all about. You see, for Paul everything outside of Jesus was essentially death. "For me to live Christ." Christ and sin, for Paul, are antithetical. That's why he's so grieved about his indwelling sin.

So what about you tonight? You today? You this week? What is your life? Let's pretend for a moment that we just handed every one of you a piece of paper and the piece of paper says, "For me to live," and there's a blank and it says, "put in one word." Well, what would your word be? Be honest. "For me to live work? Spouse? Kids? Grandkids? Great grandkids? Friends? Reputation? Popularity? Fame? Money?" Or would you say "Jesus, Jesus Christ"? Could you live a week without Jesus? A month? You know, in Detroit they did a study with 30 families who volunteered for it. The study was this: we'll give you \$500 if you could live without your television for one month. How many families do you think made it through a month? Eight, 22 caved in, just couldn't make it the whole month. One family caved in on day 29, two more days and they would have had \$500 but couldn't do without. Could you live a month? If someone gave you \$500

and said you cannot use the name of Jesus for one month, you can't open the Bible and read of him, could you make it a month? Is he your life?

Thirdly, love for Christ. If your life is Christ, you have love for him, love that you can't even put into words. You know, if you have a really good marriage, you just, you're grappling for words to tell your spouse how much you love him or her, aren't you? You can't put it into words and you can't explain it really to anyone else. This person is so special to you, you could love her to pieces, well, you don't want to put her in pieces, but you just love her like crazy, right? That's how a Christian feels about God times 1,000. God is so good to me. He is so great and he is so perfect. I couldn't think of one thing to change about him even if I could. He's wonderful. You see, when Christ is your life, you just love everything about Christ. He's your motivator. Paul said, "The love of Christ constrains me." The love of Christ was the engine of Paul's life and all the cars and the caboose of his life were attached to that engine. The love of Christ is what made him tick, it's what filled his mouth, his heart, his life.

It's amazing if you look at one of Paul's epistles and you just walk across the page. I'll just do it right now, this page we're opened to, verse 11, Jesus Christ. Verse 13, Christ. Verse 15, Christ. Verse 16, Christ. Lord. Lord Jesus. Jesus Christ. Spirit of Jesus Christ. Christ. With Christ. Jesus Christ. Him. That was just verses 12 through 30. It's everywhere, across every page 20, 30, 40 times. You see, Martin Luther said Paul could not keep Christ out of his pen because the Holy Spirit kept Christ in his heart. The old saying was that all roads lead to Rome, well, for Paul, they all lead to Jesus. He said, "I'm determined," Corinthians, "not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ." Paul is a Solus Christus man and he's saying, "That's the only way to live. This is my great theme." He says to the Colossians, "Christ is all and in all. That's it. Everything we believe, everything we have as believers, we believe and we have and we are in relationship to Jesus Christ. He's the theme of my life. O to truly live is to truly live in Christ and by Christ and for Christ and through Christ and unto Christ out of love for Christ." Solus Christus.

Now this is amazing when you consider that Paul in every epistle is writing about Jesus, and in most epistles, not the pastoral ones so much but in the regular ones he writes to the churches, he's actually motivated to write these letters to give them advice and to solve problems in the church. The Corinthians had a lot of problems so what Paul does is he would put down a slice of bread, we call it the sandwich principle, he'd tell them how much he loves them, how much he's praying for them, and then he'd put in the meat, a slice of meat of criticism. He'd say, "I hear there's a problem among you. Some of you are Paul's, some of you are Cephas', etc. Should you not all be of Christ?" You see, his answer to every problem, there's eight levels of meat in 1 Corinthians, it's a fat sandwich, but the answer to every problem is Jesus, and to every area of need in life is Jesus. Are there divisions in the church among you? Answer: is Christ divided? Is there an immoral man in the assembly? Purge out the old leaven that you may be a new lump for Christ our passover, his sacrifice for us. Are there immoral temptations among them? Such were some of you but you're washed, you're sanctified, you're justified in the name of the Lord Jesus.

And then every duty of life. How are you to live as a husband, Christian husband? Well, you're to live the way, you're to love your wife the way Christ loved the church. How are you to live as a wife, Christian wife? Well, you're to show the respect and reverence that the church shows to Christ to your husband. When he tells us to forgive each other, he says do it as Christ who forgave you, Colossians 3:13. When he exhorts you to be generous in your giving, he reminds you that you should give the way Christ who gives so much for us, 2 Corinthians 8:9. When he exhorts us to humility, he says put on the mind of Christ, Philippians 2:5.

You see, Christ is the answer to every human problem. To the lost, to the saved, it's all Jesus. "He's all I preach. For me to live is Christ. I just love him with all my heart." All roads, all problems, all needs lead to Jesus Christ. Like the Puritan, Thomas Brooks, said, "Christ is lovely, Christ is very lovely, Christ is most lovely, Christ is always lovely, Christ is altogether lovely, Christ is the most sparkling diamond in the Father's ring of glory." If you love him, keep his commandments.

Fourthly, we not only if our life is Christ, we not only are linked to him and our finding love for him, but we also grow in likeness to him. Likeness to him. This is a very important thing. You see, if you are really in Christ and you're not backsliding and you're growing, you grow in likeness to him. You learn, as Cornelius Van Til said, you learn to think Christ's thoughts after him. When you're in the word, the written word, you're into the living Word, Jesus, and you learn to think like he thinks and speak like he speaks and act more like he acts despite your sin.

Have you ever seen a very elderly couple who've been married, say, 65 years? Actually, my in-laws were married 65 years this past Sunday and it's wonderful to see their quiet love for each other. And you see an elderly couple like that and you see all these years together they've had, and you look at them and sometimes, actually, you almost think they start to look alike and they think alike and they can finish each other's sentences, and they know what each other is going to say. Sometimes they know each other's thoughts even better than they themselves know perhaps because they just love each other. They're just like one piece together, one couple. These two shall be one and, you see, that's what this union with Christ does, you grow more and more, more and more like Jesus.

We had a very old couple in our church. They're both with the Lord now but, oh, what a sweet couple. They would literally lean on each other when they walked into church and you just couldn't imagine the one without the other, and then the Lord took away the husband, 89 years old. His wife was 88 and I went to visit her and just this thin, frail, little lady and I just thought, "Oh, how is she going to make it without her husband?" And I said that to her, I said, "This is going to be hard on you, isn't it?" "Oh, yes," she says, "my Lord Jesus, I have him. He will help me through." Wow.

That's it, you see, for me to live Christ. The more you grow in Jesus, the more you become like him. It was said of Paul that the savor of Christ, the smell of Christ oozed out of him. 2 Corinthians 2:15. You see, the best compliment you can ever get from



someone in my opinion, is when someone says to you in sincerity, "I see Jesus in you. I see Jesus in you."

Now what does it mean to become like Christ, though? A thousand things, of course, but let's boil it down to three. I think you can get most of it into three things. If you become more like Christ, you develop more and more a servant heart. A servant heart. Jesus was a servant. You teenagers, when I was 16 years old, I had a brother who was 19 and he walked into my bedroom one day and he said, "You know, Joel, I figured out what life is all about. I can say it in one word." I said, "One word? Wow, what's that?" And he goes, "Service." I said, "Service? What do you mean?" He said, "Well, it's quite simple, God created us to serve him, to serve each other, Adam was to serve Eve, and to serve God through work, work in the garden, and our whole life was centered around service. Then we decided to live selfishly, we broke covenant with God, but when we get regenerated and born again, God reworks his image in us, as it were, in terms of the knowledge, righteousness and holiness we lost, and so we get oriented toward service again. That's what really life is all about and we get true happiness only when we get restored some of what we lost in paradise and we get oriented to a life of service." Isn't that true? It's more blessed to give than to receive. When you really can serve God or man, that's when you get true satisfaction in life. So that's what he said to me and I said to him, "Yeah, that sounds pretty good to me." Well, now a half a century later, that sounds very good to me.

Life is about service really, living out of Jesus and then serving others, and the more we're like him, the more that servant heart will develop within us. And then too, we develop more and more a loving heart. You know, Jesus was a people person. He took up little babies in his arms when it wasn't kosher to do so. He healed the lepers. He dared to touch them though they were unclean. Nothing held Jesus back from loving the most notorious of sinners. The more you're like Jesus, the more you'll love people, the souls of people, see their value.

And finally, to become like Jesus is to have a humble heart. Jesus was incredibly humble, meek and lowly. The more we're like him, the more humble we are. Like Augustine said when someone asked him what are the three qualities, three virtues that the church needs the most today and his answer was humility, humility, humility.

Now I'm not asking you tonight do you have these four things: linked with Christ, life in Christ, love for Christ and likeness with Christ. Do you have them to the degree you wish you had them? You'd probably be a Pharisee if you did, if you thought you had all these things fully. But what I am asking you is are these four things alive in you? Do you have something of them? Is there this attachment to Christ? Is there this life in Christ? Is there love for Christ? Is there likeness, some degree of likeness with Christ? Well, you see, then death will be your gain. Death will be your gain because you're in Christ.

Now that seems to be a radical statement of Paul, doesn't it? But you see, as awful as death is, and death is awful, Paul does not see it as an obstacle because of what we'll leave behind and because of what we'll receive when we die, those two things, and I'll be briefer here. But the first thing you need to understand is that when we die, if we're in

Christ, everything good that we leave behind will be better in heaven. I had the privilege once of preaching in Spurgeon's church in London and a man came down from the balcony afterwards when I came down from the pulpit, and he came up to me and he said, "You know," the whole sermon was on heaven, he said, "I agree with everything you said about heaven but," he said, "I'm going to really miss my wife in heaven." I go, "Miss your wife? You will recognize each other in heaven. She'll be standing beside you. You won't have the same kind of physical intimacy relationship you have but you'll both be focused exclusively on Jesus, you'll have a better relationship with her than you ever had on earth." You see, Paul had to leave behind Timothy, he had to leave behind Silas, yes, but in heaven he has a better relationship with Timothy and Silas than he ever had on earth.

So death will be gain because even the good things we leave behind will be better in heaven but it also will be gain because the bad things we leave behind won't be in heaven. No more sin, can you imagine? Can you imagine no more sin? John Owen once said, "If indwelling sin is not your biggest problem in your life, I seriously doubt if you're a Christian." But on that day, it will be no more a problem. No more sin. No more darkness. No more night. No more mystery. No more labor and sorrow. You leave behind a life of afflictions, Paul. You won't be beaten with rods anymore, or stoned, or suffer shipwreck, or be in the deep for a night and a day, and in perils of waters and perils of the city and perils of the wilderness and perils of the sea and perils of false brethren, and in weariness and painfulness and hunger and thirst and fastings and suffering cold and nakedness. Done. You'll be with Jesus forever. There will be no more buffeting Satan. No more enticing world. No more problems with the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. No more troubling thorn in the flesh that Paul never did quite understand. No more unanswered prayers. No more vexing riddles. No more worldliness. No more temptation. No more temptation to be tempted. Think of it, all evil rolled out, all good rolled in. No more tears. No more pain. No more night. No more death. No more curse.

Death, gain because of what I leave behind, but then even more positively, death will be gain because of what I receive. What I receive. Even the dying process is a process through which we receive blessing. As hard as death is, it brings us into communion with Christ's sufferings. It gives us a unique experience of Christ's all-sufficient grace. Death transforms us more into Christ's image. Dying is our last and perhaps greatest opportunity to witness for Christ's glory. Our deathbed can be a pulpit. And dying brings us into Christ's presence. One old Scottish divine said, "Dying is my wheelchair that rolls me into the presence of Christ where wheelchairs are needed no more."

Dying brings me into eternal perfect life with Christ. A perfect life with Christ. And it gives me perfect knowledge of Christ. I no longer have to see through a glass darkly but then face-to-face. Dying initiates us into perfect activities. We will do all things well as the spirits of just men made perfect. Our worship will be flawless in God's sight. We'll serve God perfectly. We'll be before the throne, serve him day and night in his temple, and he that sits on the throne shall dwell among us. We will co-reign with Christ over what we don't know but it will be sweet. Dying welcomes us into a perfect home with perfect mansions and perfect light, without need for the sun or the moon or the stars

because our Savior will be the light thereof. We'll perpetually feast with him. At his right hand there are pleasures forevermore.

We'll join the heavenly choir. What a choir that will be. If anyone has heard at a conference 5,000 men singing together the praises of Christ and looked around and many men, the tears were just streaming out of their eyes, the beauty of the angelic-like choir of so many men in one place singing praises to Christ. Well, 5,000 will be a drop in the bucket compared to heaven. Millions upon millions upon millions lifting up their voice to praise the Son of God. Samuel Rutherford said, "God can make 10,000 heavens full of good and glorious joys but all of them combined together cannot compare to the joy of just being with Jesus Christ."

And so, you see, the question is so important, is your life Solus Christus? Because if it is, your death will be gain. But if it's not, I need to say it, your death will be hell. It will bring you to hell and hell is as bad as heaven is good. Hell is as tragic as heaven is blessed. Hell will mean no communion with God forever and ever and ever. Are you ready to die? If you were to die today, would you be ready? Is your life Christ? Is your life Christ?

You know, Charles Spurgeon said something just amazing. He said, you know, a Christian is someone that dies every day to his own righteousness. To be a Christian is a dying life. He said, but you get so used to dying to your own righteousness and so used to finding righteousness in Christ that death should not be so overwhelming to you because when you actually do come to die, you just have to die one more time and then you can be with Jesus forever. So the worst thing that can happen to you is the best thing that can happen to you.

So here's the only way to live and to die. Rutherford put it so well, "Build your nest in no tree here on earth because God has sold the entire forest to death. Build your life only on the rock, Jesus Christ." That's the way to live. That's the way to die.

I want to close this message with two illustrations. One is about David Livingstone who was a great missionary, as you know, in Africa and when Livingstone came to die, the local natives treasured him so much they did something that seems gross to us. They actually cut out physically his heart and they kept it in Africa and they sent his body back to England for an honorable Westminster Abbey funeral. And the crowds on both sides of the road when the hearse went by were awesome, but there were two men in that crowd, one was kind of a shabbily dressed man, the other was a pastor standing right next to him, and as the hearse went by, the shabbily dressed man just kept saying, "You were right, Davey. You were right, Davey. You were right, Davey." And after the hearse went by, the minister said, "What did you mean by that?" Well, the shabbily dressed man said, "I grew up with David Livingstone. We were in the same church here in England, went to the same Sunday school, and when I became 18 years old, I said to David Livingstone, now I'm going to go out into the business world and I'm going to make my money and later on after I get my money, I'll come back to God and do the Christian thing again. And David Livingstone said that's no way to live. The only way to live is to live Christ."

And now I see today," said the shabbily dressed man, "David Livingstone was right. There's no other way, no other way to live." And no other way to really prepare to die well. You see those who live well in Christ, die well in Christ.

So do you want to live well? Do you want to die well? The answer is Solus Christus which leads me to my last illustration, the last words of the covenanting martyr, Hugh Mackail. Mackail was hanged in Edinburgh, Scotland for his commitment to the Reformed faith. A large crowd was gathered there that day. After singing Psalm 31 about our times being in God's hands, he began to climb the scaffold to his own beheading. As he climbed up the ladder, he said, "I care no more to go up this ladder and over it than if I were going home to my father's house." As he went up further, he said, "Every step I climb is a degree nearer to heaven." When he got to the top, he read some verses from God's word, he addressed the crowds as the noose was placed around his neck and then he said this, "Now I leave off to speak anymore to creatures and I turn my speech to thee, O living Lord. Now I begin my unending communion with God which shall never be broken off. Farewell, father and mother. Farewell, friends and relatives. Farewell, the world with all of its delights. Farewell, meat and drink. Farewell, sun and moon and stars. Welcome, God and Father. Welcome, sweet Lord Jesus, mediator of the new covenant. Welcome, blessed Spirit of grace, God of all consolation. Welcome, glory. Welcome, eternal life. Welcome, death." And with those words the noose tightened around his neck and he passed into the presence of his Savior.

Welcome, death. That's the way to live. That's the way to die.

Let's pray.

*Gracious God, the answer for everything we need, everything we confess, everything we search for and long for deep inside is Jesus Christ. Help us to see that tonight. Help us to go to our homes tonight and get beside our beds and get down on our knees and pray, "Help me, O Lord God, to live Solus Christus, to live Christ, and one day to die gain." Please, Lord, don't let any of these children or young people be like that shabbily dressed man. Don't let any parent or grandparent be like that shabbily dressed man. Help us all to bend the knee to the King of kings, to surrender everything, to disavow our own righteousness and cling to the righteousness of Jesus Christ for the best of our righteousnesses are as filthy rags in thy sight. We thank thee, Lord, thank thee so much for the double obedience of Jesus Christ, and we thank thee so much for the gift of faith to put our trust in that double obedience, in that Redeemer by this wonderful Holy Spirit who works it in us. Please bless us now and go with us, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*