

# To Live is Christ

*Philippians*

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**Bible Text:** Philippians 1:19-30  
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If you would take your Bible, please, and let's turn together to the New Testament book of Philippians. Philippians 1. I want to begin reading at verse 19 through the end of verse 30. Philippians 1. I want to just remind you before you leave today, also out in the lobby if you live locally and you could help us out a great deal by taking a Vacation Bible School yard sign and placing it in your yard and that will help us to advertise for Vacation Bible School is coming up very early in June this year and so if you'll take one of those with you, put it up in the yard, it'll help a lot. Also, the Baby Bottle Campaign, most of you are familiar with that, stop by, grab a bottle or two, fill it up, bring it back by Father's Day. That'll help our New Hope Pregnancy Resource Center. Again, a lot going on. You don't have to do everything but what you can do is greatly appreciated.

Philippians 1, beginning at verse 19 Paul writes,

19 for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, 20 as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. 24 But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again. 27 Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, 28 and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. 29 For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, 30 engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

This is God's word.

Let me pray.

*Our great and mighty God, we confess that without your life in us we don't even know how to define life properly, much less live it properly, and so we need your help far more than we can even begin to realize. Father, you have promised to work in us both to will and to do of your good pleasure so we ask now please do that work, please do that work by the power of your Holy Spirit and through the ministry of your word. For the sake of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

I want to begin this morning by seeing a series of pictures. The first picture is of Spirit Lake Lodge near Mount Saint Helens. Spirit Lake Lodge was located in Washington state on the north side of Mount Saint Helens. Now some of you who are a bit younger, you may not remember Mount Saint Helens. Here's a picture of it before its eruption. It was a beautiful place, a beautiful lovely place but it didn't remain that way. The lodge was at the base of the mountain right there near Spirit Lake and it was owned by a man named Harry Truman. You'll see a picture of him. This is Harry R. Truman, not Harry S. Truman, the former President. Harry, along with other residents, were warned to evacuate the area. The experts were predicting that the mountain was indeed going to erupt but Harry did not leave. In fact, he remained in spite of the fact that thousands of schoolchildren across the United States wrote him letters in tears, pleading with him to leave, that the situation was so dangerous, but he would not leave.

So after a series of earthquakes, on the morning of May 18, 1980, Mount Saint Helens erupted and it was such an enormous eruption that volcanic ash was distributed over 11 surrounding states. That's staggering. And then to realize that only 57 people were killed. One of them was Harry Truman along with his 16 cats. They were buried under 150 feet of volcanic ash never to be seen again. The Mount Saint Helens eruption is known as the most disastrous volcanic eruption in US history.

Question: why wouldn't Harry leave? Why wouldn't he leave? Well, in addition to feeling that the danger was exaggerated, you can go online and catch some of Harry's rantings with the press before this happened. Get ready for a lot of vulgar language. He was a rough old cobbler, and he just believed the whole thing was exaggerated. But another reason he would not leave as he pointed at Spirit Lake Lodge and he said, "This is my life. This is my life." You know, we might be inclined to think that Harry was just crazy but I want to suggest to you this morning, I think we can better understand Harry than we really realize.

The other morning I was out in the parking lot, Wednesday morning we were having a prayer walk, and I want to invite you to come from 8 until 9, and somewhere around 8:45, I was still walking and a car pulled up, a gentleman hopped out and he drove to the back of the parking lot and he hopped out and he walked over to one of our light poles, he lifted up this metal bracket around the bottom, he lifted it up and I saw him get something

out and I thought, well, I've caught somebody in a drug, you know, drug bust, you know? But it wasn't that. As I got closer, he said, "I bet you're wondering what I'm doing." I said, "Yup, I sure am." And he said, "I am a geocacher." Now I had not heard of this but he explained. He said, "This is a modern-day adult form of treasure hunting." What happens is they use these GPS locators to find these little containers, these little caches or containers that have something inside of them and they're hid all over the place. And so a person goes out and they're on a treasure hunt to find this, once they find it, they get a number off of it, write it down, and he tells me that he's in the process of going to every county in Kentucky to find this one little piece in every... And I was amazed, like, you know, "Don't you work? Don't you have a wife? You know, is this all you do?" Then he blew my mind, he said, "I've already done this in six states, every county." And then he said, "I have a friend who's doubled that."

So I blurted out, I said, "Man, this is life-consuming. How do you have time to do anything else? This is life-consuming." He said, "Absolutely." And I tell you this because I think we can understand Harry and others like him, I really do, because we're apt to say things like this, "This possession is my life." That's what Harry was saying. Harry had been at Spirit Lake Lodge for 52 years and he had grown to say, "This is my life. I have no life outside of this." Or it might be a person, "This person is my life. Without them, what would I be? Where would I go without this person or this passion? This is my life. This is what I do." You see, natural man is hard-wired for this. Natural man is hard-wired to look to possessions and people and things and say, "This is my life. Without it, I have nothing." So Harry may not be as difficult for us to relate to as we might think. Perhaps the most difficult task we have is understanding the Apostle Paul. Oh yeah, because Paul said, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Natural man can't say that. Natural man will never say that. Only a converted person can grow to come to say, "For me to live is Christ."

So here's what we're going to do this morning, we're going to ask three questions. We're going to ask what does Paul mean when he says, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." What does he mean by that? We need to know. Secondly, we're going to ask how does Paul's definition of life, and that's what it is, it's a definition of life, how does it help him to shape his perspective? How does it help him to live life as it is with all of its ups and downs? And then thirdly, we'll ask how do we develop this definition for life?

So what does Paul mean? Well, you see it in verse 21, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Now just remember when he wrote that sentence, in fact when he wrote this whole letter, where was he? He was in prison, right? He's restrained. He's constrained. He's not able to go and do what he wants to do yet because of his alignment with Jesus Christ, he's been put in his present circumstances which makes his declaration even more astounding. For him to be able to write this under his circumstances is mind-blowing. So what does he mean? Well, we could say this. First, generally speaking Paul is saying, "My life is lived here and now and it's Christ-centered." Generally speaking that's what he means. We'll get more specific in a moment but generally he is describing his life as being Christ-centered.

"For me to live is Christ," but we need to get more specific. More specific he is saying, "I'm living a life here and now in fruitful labor to honor Jesus Christ whose servant I am." Now I want you to see this with me, okay? I'm not making this up. When Paul says, "For me to live is Christ," he is speaking specifically of, "I live life here and now dedicated to fruitful labor to honor and magnify Christ whose servant I am." I want you to see it. Look at verse 20, let's start there. The latter part of verse 20 he says, "but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored," do you see the word, "honored in my body." You may have a translation that says "magnified." We'll get to that in a minute. But he's living that Christ will be honored in his body. Verse 22, "If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me." So when Paul speaks about, "For me to live, for me to live out my life," he's talking about, "I live for fruitful labor for Christ." Then in verse 25, "Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all," notice this, "for your progress and joy in the faith."

Now let's go back to that word "honored." Fundamentally Paul says, "I want Christ to be honored in my body." Another word for that is "magnified," and I've been told that there are two kinds of magnifying. There's the microscopic magnifying and then there's the telescopic magnifying. Microscopic magnifying, listen, makes a small thing look bigger than it is. You slip something under a microscope, it's small but it makes it look bigger. But telescopic magnifying makes a big thing that's big already to look as big as it really is. So listen, the calling of every Christian is to telescopic magnifying. Paul is saying, "That's what I live for, to make my Lord's greatness begin to look as great as it really is." So when he says, "For me to live is Christ, my life is devoted to telescopic magnifying, that everybody will see him as great and wonderful as he is."

So that's what Paul is saying, "This is life for me. This is life for me." But now we ask another question that is equally important: how does Paul's definition of life, and that's what we see as he's defining his life to us, how does Paul's definition of life help shape his perspective on life? Notice what does this look like? It's one thing for Paul to say, "For to me to live is Christ," we can say things like that but what does it look like lived out?

Well, first, I want you to notice Paul has a definition of life that enables him to face anything. I want you to think about that with me for a moment. Don't you want a definition of life that will help and enable you to face anything that might come? Because you live in a world where anything can come. Every one of us in this room are susceptible to the rug being pulled out from underneath us at any time. This possession, this person, what we love and we cherish, we hold onto, at any time it can be stripped away from us. But Paul has a definition of life that enables him to face anything. I mean, don't you want to say to Paul, "Paul, how can you say this? Look at your circumstances." But I think he would say this to us, "Yes, but what I live for hasn't been touched. What I really am living for hasn't been touched. Oh, I'm in prison, I've been persecuted, I've been stoned, I've been persecuted for Christ, I've had my ups and downs, but through all of it what I live for hasn't been touched because I live, I live for Christ."

So let's take, first, Paul's perspective on death, the great enemy, the great enemy that every one of us is going to have to face. How does Paul's definition of life help shape Paul's perspective on death? Look at verses 19 and 20, "for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body," notice this phrase, "whether by life or by death." Now we've got to clear up something here and I want you to pay close attention. Verse 19, gotta clear this up. It sounds like at first when you read verse 19 he said, "for I know that through your prayers," in other words, "I know you're going to pray for me and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, this is going to turn out for my deliverance." It sounds like Paul is saying, "Don't worry. I'm going to get out of this. No big deal. It's going to be fine. I'll get out of jail." It might sound like that Paul is claiming some kind of private revelation here but he's not. How do we know? Verse 20, verse 20 says that "Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death." In other words, right at this moment under his present circumstance, he doesn't know whether he's going to live or die, so when he says in verse 19, "I know this is going to work out for my deliverance," he doesn't mean that he knows for sure how things are going to work out.

Another reason we know this is because the word "deliverance" in verse 19, he said, "This will turn out for my deliverance." Another word that's used there is "salvation" and you should know this, the Bible speaks of our salvation as being past, present and future. We were saved. We are being saved. And we will be saved. And so most assuredly Paul is speaking here of future deliverance, future salvation. In other words, he is saying here in verse 19, "Ultimately, I don't know what's going to happen in the meantime but ultimately I know I'm going to be fine because I belong to him. His life is in me, you see." Now in the meantime though, Paul's desire, his goal is that Christ be honored and magnified whether he lives or whether he dies. That's Paul's perspective on life because of his definition of life. In other words, he can face the harsh prospect of dying as long as it honors Christ.

There's an anniversary that's coming up May 14. Back in 1988, you'll remember, I know many of you will the Carrollton bus crash. It was 24 children, 3 adults died in what was called the worst drunken driver accident in Kentucky's history. The Carrollton First Assembly of God, I should say in Radcliffe, Kentucky, was transporting children on an outing and on the bus was a man named Chuck Kytta who was the youth minister, and he was seated in the front of the bus behind the driver and when the gas tank exploded a heartbeat after the collision, he was instantly encircled in flames. When Chuck saw the flames around him, witnesses said he looked up, lifted his hands and cried, "Jesus, I'm coming home," and some of the kids who witnessed it said he was smiling when he said it. Now Ninie Hammon was a reporter working for a small paper in Lebanon, Kentucky, and she now went on to be the editor of Southeast Outlook Newspaper but she had fellow reporters who were covering this and she was getting information and here's what she said,

"I was not a Christian in 1988, so I couldn't make any sense of what Chuck did. Here's this guy so cool a bunch of kids call him 'Banana,' standing in flames moments from a horrible death and he's smiling?"

No matter how hard she tried, Ninie could not erase from her mind the image of Chuck. Ninie wrote, 'The only way to explain how a man could calmly accept, almost welcome, a painful death was to acknowledge that he understood some great truth I didn't, that he had something faith? hope? God, maybe? something! I didn't have. And try as I might, I couldn't help yearning for whatever he had that made death a thing to embrace rather than to fear.'

Two years later, Ninie would come to Christ [and here's what she would say] 'Chuck Kytta planted a seed in me that took root in my heart. One day, I will see Chuck in heaven. I'll tell him how the manner of his death pointed me toward eternal life.'

That's what Paul's talking about, "For me to live is Christ whether I live or whether I die." Because he had that definition of life, he had a perspective on death. He actually said to die is gain, "I'll be with Jesus which is far better." Yet Paul is able to say this, he's able to say it and mean it, whether life or death, because for him to live is Christ.

But then there's his perspective on serving others. Verses 24 and 25, I want you to see this, "But to remain in the flesh," in other words, to keep living, "is more necessary on your account." Do you see that? Paul realizes, "There's a necessity that I stay and serve you." Verse 25, "Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith." Now just stop here. He's in prison, he's in prison and rather than being guided by his personal desires, Paul's concern for others shines through.

His specific concern is, what? For their progress and joy in the faith. Do you know what that is? That is the heartbeat of discipleship. In other words, it's not enough for Paul to say, "I want to get the gospel out. I want people to come to Jesus." No, he wants to disciple them.

So we hear a lot of definitions about discipling, a lot of different opinions about what discipleship is and what it's not, but I want you to see here the fundamental heart of discipling is the desire for men and women, boys and girls, to progress, to further in the faith and enjoy in the faith. This is the trajectory that God has for every Christian, that you progress in the faith and you do it in joy because, you see, joy is an indispensable element. It wouldn't surprise me a bit if some of you sitting here today and you say, "I believe Christian truths and I believe this, believe that," but it's been a long time since you've been able to do it with joy. Joy, you see, Paul said, "I want to stick with you, I want to help you. It's necessary that I be with you. It's necessary that we be together. It's necessary we do this together so that I can disciple you, I can help you progress in the faith and joy." This is Paul's deep concern. Why? Because for him to live is Christ.

Then there's Paul's perspective on suffering. Notice verse 28 with me. He said, "and not frightened in anything by your opponents." Paul is aware that the Philippians are facing opposition. Friends, look, if we live for Christ, no matter what generation it is, whether it be the first century, second century, or right now, if you live godly for Christ, you will face persecution. You will face opposition. People are not going to welcome you in, you know, and say, "Oh, we love your stance on marriage. We love your stance on sexuality. We love your stance on this." No. No, we're going to be opposed and so Paul begins to address their present suffering but look what he says in verse 29. This is great. "For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake,." That word "granted" is powerful. Paul is actually saying if you can believe this, he's saying, "Suffering for the gospel has been granted to you as a gift from God." I know that we may see it differently but I just want you to see how God sees it. God sees the fact that he gifts us, he grants us a gift of suffering for the sake of Christ. You say, "What in the world?"

Now don't misunderstand. Paul is not saying that suffering is great, that we ought to jump up and down and go, "Woohoo!" No, he's not saying that at all. However he is pointing out that God will use the suffering of the believer to serve his own good purposes. And see, right now you ought to be going, "Well, what in the world good purposes can suffering for Christ serve?" Well, I'm glad you asked because look at verse 28, "and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This," this suffering, "is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God." Now what does that mean? Their suffering for Christ provides abundant clarity. It identifies who stands with Christ and who doesn't stand with Christ. Those who are opposing Christianity do not stand with Christ no matter what they may say, but those who suffer for Christ, those who suffer for Christ, it's a clear sign. Those who remain faithful under suffering have the assurance that their commitment to Christ is genuine, it's real. So God gives us this gift to provide clarity, to help us see, "I really do belong to Jesus. My commitment to him is really real."

Suffering also identifies the believer with the sufferings of Christ. You see that in verse 29. We suffer for the sake of Christ, we suffer for his sake. It's in the way, it's in this way that suffering for the advance of the gospel is a gift. So we're suffering with Christ and Paul then in verse 30 tells the Philippians that they share a common struggle together. He uses the word "conflict, engaged in the same conflict." He's telling his fellow believers, "Look, we're in this together. Don't ever think you're out there alone. We're in this together for the advance of the gospel." And in effect, here's what Paul is doing, he is discipling these Philippian believers toward a definition of life that they may say as well, "For me to live is Christ." You see, everything that he's writing here is discipling, it's helping them to progress, helping them to get a perspective. His perspective is, "For me to live is Christ," he wants them to have that same perspective. God wants you and I to have that same definition and perspective of life.

So our definition of life will shape our perspective on life and how we live it. So let me stop here before we look at one last thing. What is your life? This text is begging you to ask that question, to do some exploration and ask yourself, "What is my life? What have I

built my life upon? What is the foundation of my life? How do I define life?" That brings us to one last question: how do we gain this definition of life? Friends, I want this definition of life. I want this approach to life because I know that the things of this world are ephemeral, they're passing, they're temporal. Anything that I try to build my life on of this world will fail me. I want something to build upon. I want a definition of life that will help me to face anything, and I believe that's what you want. How do we get it?

First let me say, it's not an easy thing. It's not an easy thing. You see, if you're here this morning and you're in a natural state, you may be religious and all of that but you're not born again, the life of God doesn't course through you. There's a difference, friend. There's a difference. There's a difference in being religious and coming to church and being born again, having a life of God in you. If you're here this morning and you're just merely religious, you probably hear this and you think, "Eh, this is typical. Over the top, preacher, over the top." Yet for those who do have the life of God coursing through them and have been born anew, God is at work in you. God is at work in you. God is at work in you that you might have this definition of life, that you will come to a place and say, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain," to really be able to say it and mean it. So first, it's not easy and it's not automatic. Just because you've become a Christian doesn't mean that automatically, "Huh, I got it." No.

So I thought a lot about that this week and there's something that Paul writes later in this letter that points me to an answer. Since this is not easy and it's not automatic yet I need it, there's something that Paul says later in this letter and here's how I would phrase it, it's continual counting and continual treasuring. I want you to see it in Philippians 3, a little later in this letter he will say this, "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ." I want you to keep that verse there for just a minute. Language matters. Words matter. And we need to dig just a tiny bit here because this is an English translation, you won't see this in an English translation but you would in the original Greek. What Paul is saying, he is saying when he says, "I count everything or I regard everything," actually the language says this, "I continue to regard. I continue to count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."

Now why is that so important to me? Why was that such a blessing to me this week? It's because you might be here today and you say, "Look, preacher, I love Jesus. I love Jesus, I really do and I want this to be the definition of my life, but I don't feel like I'm there. I feel like I make some progress but I don't know, there's other things, there's other things that I hold onto and I'm so afraid, I'm so afraid of losing them and I'm so afraid that they might be my life and I don't want them to be. I want Jesus to be my life." And since it's not automatic, what we find Paul saying here is, "I continue. I continue to regard. I continue to evaluate." In other words, Paul is describing here a progression, a continual learning of Jesus, a continual beholding of Jesus that results in a continual treasuring of Jesus. Do you understand what I'm saying? In other words, as Paul lives the Christian life, it's not automatic, it isn't all of sudden, you know, just plopped right down in his soul. No, as he continues to look to Jesus, as he continues to treasure Jesus, behold Jesus,



obey Jesus, walk with Jesus, he is now continually counting everything else as loss. It sounds like this, Paul's able to say, "That's not my life. I see now that's not my life and that's not my life. For me to live is Christ." So it's not all of a sudden, it's not automatic, but it's as we progress in the Christian life, keeping our eyes on Jesus. We've got to see the continual treasuring of Christ so that we will continually be counting and regarding everything else as loss.

Now how can we do this? How can we do this? The same way. The same way. So homework. I encourage you to go home today, take your Bible, open to John 17 and read the high priestly prayer of Jesus, alright? Do that. Here's what you're going to find. I'm going to show you one verse of this prayer. Jesus is praying to the Father and he says, "While I was with them I kept them in your name which you have given me." So what he's saying, "I kept them. I kept those you gave me." Okay? "I was able to keep them. I have guarded them and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction that the Scripture might be fulfilled." That one verse along with the rest of the prayer, when you read it here's what's going to stand out: it's Jesus praying to the Father and saying, "I live for them. I live for them." When you read that prayer, I want you to do it today, read this prayer and what I think will emerge for you is Jesus praying to the Father, having this conversation that he's praying to the Father and he says, "I live for them." It's going to be so clear that he said, "I live for them. I live for them."

You see, the more it gets into our hearts that Jesus lived for us, he died for us, he rose for us, and he's raised and lives for us now to ever intercede for us, the more that gets into our hearts we can legitimately begin to say, "For me to live is Christ." Get that into your heart. Whatever it takes, get it into your heart and guard your heart. Don't let it out. Don't let all the other stuff in but don't let this out. Guard your heart. Get it in your heart that he lives and intercedes for you, and as that gets in your heart, you'll not only be able to say this, the words, you'll be able to live it, "For me to live is Christ."