

Prepared To Live And To Live Is Christ

Last Sunday I shared some predictions for 2011. Monday morning I received a text message that read, "Let me see if I have this right...one day after you preach on the certainty of end time activity, we have 4,000 birds fall out of the sky all at once and 100,000 fish die in the Arkansas River?" I did feel somewhat vindicated I have to admit. And then I received an email from our General Superintendent asking us to pray for our brothers and sisters in Iran. We mentioned the attack in Egypt on new years eve. Now they are reporting a crack down on Christians in Iran. More than 70 Christians were arrested in Iran, including one of our Assemblies of God pastors. Friends, I'm sad to say I've been right about a couple of those predictions already. We need to pray for the church in Iran, in Pakistan, in Egypt and in so many of these countries where they are coming under such persecution.

Something else I said last Sunday kept echoing in my mind and spirit all week. At the close of the service I asked if 2011 would be your last year, are you prepared to die? And then I asked what I said was an equally important question, are you prepared to live? I couldn't get away from that question all week long. Are you prepared to live? What does it mean for us to really live our life? Does it mean to enjoy life, to reach for and achieve our goals? Does it mean to pursue happiness and fulfillment? What does it mean to be prepared to really live life?

Here is the answer the apostle Paul gave us and I believe it to be the only true answer. **"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." Philippians 1:21.** What does it mean to live life? To live is Christ! To live is Christ! And what does that mean? Let's see if we can explore that statement and unwrap it a bit this morning.

For me to live is Christ. It begins with Christ taking up residence in our life at our spiritual new birth. We begin here, recognizing that we are sinners and that only Christ through his sacrifice on the cross can secure the forgiveness of our sins. It begins here, not with church attendance or agreeing with church doctrine or even repeating a sinner's prayer. It begins with a new birth, with being born again. It begins with believing in your heart that Jesus died for you, that he bore the penalty for your sins on the cross. You believe that, you repent and confess your sins and you receive Christ as Savior and Lord. You ask him to take up residence in your heart and life as

the Lord and master of your life. You give yourself to him unreservedly and by faith in Christ you are united with him. This is what it means for Christ to live in you and for you to live your life in him.

That's what the Apostle Paul meant when he declared, **"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."** Galatians 2:20.

"I have been crucified with Christ [so I am dead] and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body [so, yes, I am alive but it isn't the same "I" as the "I" who died], I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Galatians 2:20.

You are in Christ and Christ lives in you. That's what it means when Paul says to live is Christ. You are organically in him the way an arm is in the body or a branch is in the vine. If you are in Christ through salvation then you are joined to him, united with him in his death as you die to yourself and you are united with him in his resurrection as you become a new person - saved, redeemed, transformed by his saving grace. That is why the bible says **"Therefore if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ..."** 2 Corinthians 5:17. For me to live is Christ means that you live in Christ and Christ lives in you.

To live is Christ means that your life is lived with this number one priority and purpose: to bring glory and honor to Christ. Do you understand your reason for being? People say they live to eat, or live to ski, or live to make money. It speaks of their love, their top priority. For us, that priority is to bring honor and glory to Jesus. Why? Because that is our reason for being. That's why we are here. Look. The bible says, speaking of Jesus, **"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 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."** Colossians 1:15-16.

Don't miss that. We were created by him and for him. You were created for him. For what purpose were you created for him? The prophet Isaiah tells us. **"Bring my**

sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth – everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”
Isaiah 43:6-7.

We were created for his glory. What does that mean? We were created to bring honor and glory to him. In everything and for everything, great or small, we are to bring him glory. The bible says, **“Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” 1 Corinthians 10:31.** Our whole life is to be lived in a way that honors and brings glory to God. But again, what does that mean, to bring glory to him?

To glorify God doesn't mean we try to add more glory to him. That is impossible. He is glorious enough. He cannot be made more glorious or beautiful. But to glorify God means to magnify him. How do we magnify something? There are two possibilities here. Think of magnifying something with either a telescope or a microscope. A microscope takes something tiny and makes it look bigger than it is. That is certainly not something we are doing with God because we can't make him greater or bigger than he is.

But think of a telescope that looks far out into the galaxy and takes something that looks like only a tiny pinpoint of light and magnifies it in the sense of making it look like what it really is! To magnify something like that is to take something unimaginably great and make it look like what it really is.

John Piper wrote, “We waste our lives when we do not pray and think and dream and plan and work toward magnifying God in all spheres of life. God created us for this: to live our lives in a way that makes him look more like the greatness and the beauty and the infinite worth that he really is. In the night sky of this world God appears to most people, if at all, like a pinprick of light in a heaven of darkness. But he created us and called us to make him look like what he really is. This is what it means to be created in the image of God. We are meant to image forth in the world what he is really like.”

To live is Christ means that I am going to live my life, in every moment and in every way, in every location and every sphere of my life, to make God look like who and what he really is.

Make no mistake, there is no other way to life or to God but through Christ.

Jesus said **“I am the way, the truth and the life.” John 14:6** And Jesus said this in his prayer to the father in John 17, **“Now this is eternal life; that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.” John 17:3-5.**

It was the Father’s plan all along, that when we see the glory of God, what we see is **“the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” 2 Corinthians 4:4.** In fact, the bible says, **“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness’, made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” 2 Corinthians 4:6**

The way we see the glory of God is when we look into the bloody face of his crucified Son. That’s why Paul says he will glory or boast only in the cross. Here is where we find the glory of God, in the face of Christ. And we run to him and surrender our heart and soul and life and plans and purposes to him. “I see what you’ve done for me, Jesus. I see your glory revealed and I dedicate my life to making your glory known to the world.” We purpose in our heart to live our life in a way that makes Jesus known for who is, the Son of God who willingly gave himself to a brutal death on a cross for our salvation. Which brings us to the next point...

To live is Christ means that you live your life in order to make him large so that all can see his glory. The prophet declared, **“...Your name and renown are the desire of our hearts.” Isaiah 26:8.** Webster defines renown as “exalted reputation derived from the extensive praise of great achievements or accomplishments.” If someone is renowned they are “celebrated for great achievements, for distinguished qualities or for grandeur; eminent, remarkable.” I think Jesus qualifies, don’t you. The desire of our heart is to make his reputation, his accomplishment on the cross, his achievements of grace and power known to the whole universe.

This should be our desire, that in every moment of our life, in every choice, in every action, every behavior, every attitude, every thought, every word, every deed, every relationship, we bring honor to Christ. Think about all the desires of your heart. Is pleasing Christ and obeying him and making him known the desire of

your heart? Is he being honored by your life and your lifestyle, your choices and your actions? That's what it means when we say to live is Christ. His name, his honor, making his renown known to everyone, that is the desire of our hearts Isaiah said. Our life finds fulfillment as we make his name and his renown large and known to all, in a way that causes everyone to see Jesus for who he really is, the Eternal God, the crucified Savior, the risen Lord of life and the coming conquering King.

To live is Christ means that we take up our cross and follow him as Lord of our life. To live is Christ means he is our Master, our treasure and our pleasure, our purpose, and the only way we can ever know satisfaction or fulfillment. Living for ourselves, living to please ourselves, will never satisfy. The reason it can't satisfy goes back to what I told you earlier, that we were created for his pleasure, to bring him glory. If we are trying to please ourselves and get glory for ourselves, we will only find misery because we are denying the very purpose for which we exist. But when we die to ourselves and take up our cross and spend our lives bringing honor and glory to him, then we find our life - then we find fulfillment because we are living in the very purpose for which we were created.

God, in all of his glory and beauty and splendor, created us so we could enjoy that life and fellowship with him. And then we sinned and that fellowship was broken and now through Christ and his atoning death, we have been brought back into fellowship with God. And as we deny ourselves and choose to obey him and live for him, as we take up our cross and follow him, as we sacrifice our desires in order to seek after him and the desire of his heart, we find ourselves experiencing all the beauty and glory and splendor that he desired for us in the beginning.

The truth is, when we live in a way that pleases God, we will be the most satisfied, the most complete, the most whole we can be in this life. As I said, our unhappiness and misery comes from trying to please and glorify and honor ourselves rather than God. Our joy is full when we serve and please God and obey him rather than pleasing ourselves. Jesus said, **"If you obey my commands you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."** John 15:10-11.

This is how we find complete joy, by obeying his commands, by living for him and dying for him. You see..

To live is Christ means nothing else is gain. The loss of everything else is nothing compared to the glory and the joy and the pleasure of knowing Christ and being with him. **Anything less than loving him and living for him is in fact a wasted life. Living for Jesus is the only life that matters, the only life that satisfies, the only life that counts for eternity.**

The Apostle Paul expressed that passion in a couple of ways. **“I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.” Acts 20:24.**

“But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 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...” Philippians 3:7-8

To live is Christ means one thing matters: Living for Him, glorifying him, making his name and his renown known in the world and everything else is rubbish compared to knowing him and living for him. That’s what Paul was talking about when he said, “For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

Let me read this story from John Piper’s book, *don’t waste your life*. (Page 45-46)

Don’t waste your life. Live it for Jesus, for his glory, for his purpose.