

## **Prepared to Live, To Live Is Christ Part 2**

I couldn't get away from it, that passage in Philippians we talked about last Sunday. For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. (Philippians 1:21). To live is Christ. Paul sounds so passionate, so alive when he says that. Here is the cornerstone of his existence. Here is the heartbeat that animates his life, his choices, his thoughts. Here is the source of his energy, his willingness to risk everything that others would count as precious. For me, to live is Christ!

I said last Sunday, that is more than agreeing to attend a church, or giving assent to a doctrine or creed, it is more than just repeating the words of a sinners prayer. Paul is talking about something real and substantial, something life changing and life transforming. He is talking about our life being found in Christ and Christ's life being found in us. It is a wondrous mystery for sure. And as Christians we all would hope to agree. "Yes sir, as for me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." But is that what we really think and feel?

What if we were honest this morning? Honest about our spiritual lives and the extent to which we are passionate about Jesus and living for him? Because by the time we get to the weekend and with all the activities and all the pressure and all the responsibilities, for most of us when we think about getting up and going to church on Sunday morning we think, for me to live is not Christ, it's just exhausting. Trying to keep up with church activities and youth activities and school activities and family responsibilities and with work and the household stuff and any effort required by all the other relationships. It's exhausting. And then you want me to work on my spiritual life and my discipleship. "I try to make room for God in there somewhere, I mean he gets a piece of the pie of my life and time, but for me to live is Christ? I don't know if I could go that far."

For some of us, we would have to say in terms of our spiritual life, for me to live is not Christ, it is just boring. It's routine. The same old thing. Again I'm not talking about housework or the repetitiveness of your job or your daily life (showering, dressing, driving to work and back), I'm talking about your spiritual life. We are all being honest this morning, remember. "I try to read the bible and pray but it just feels like the same old stuff. The same services, same songs, same prayer requests, same old preacher, same sermons. Nothing new happens. I come, go through the motions, hoping there is some meaning in here or by faith there is still some benefit to all this, but really, for me to live is just religious effort at this point.

Trying to live for Jesus means my best effort, succeeding sometimes, failing sometimes. Up and down, cold and hot, often settling for lukewarm, trying to keep justifying the effort expended.” That probably describes some of us.

For some of us, we would have to say, for me to live is not Christ, it is just painful. Physically, emotionally, spiritually, just trying everyday to hang on, to stay in the fight. We get home, go to bed and get up and start the next day, hoping to survive.

So here we are, listening to this ancient saint declare “for me to live is Christ and to die is gain” and we think “does he understand the pressure and the stuff we are dealing with? How can he say that?”

Let me remind you of Paul’s life and circumstances. Remember that Paul started out his life with a different name, Saul. He described himself for us in several accounts in the New Testament as he shared his conversion. In Acts 22 he tells us he was a Jew and a Roman citizen by birth. He was born in Tarsus of Cilicia but brought up in Jerusalem. He was trained under the teacher Gamaliel and was a member of the strictest sect of the Jews, a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee. That means when it comes to exerting human effort in an attempt to please God, Paul knew all there was to know about it. He tells us in Philippians that, **“If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.”**

#### **Philippians 3::4-6**

In Acts 26 Paul testifies before King Agrippa and tells him, **“I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them.”** Acts 26:9-11. But look at verse 12 as he tells Agrippa what changed his life. (Read Acts 26:12-20).

So here he is, he has all of this incredible Jewish heritage that commends him to everyone in the Jewish world and then he throws it all away in a complete reversal of everything he has

ever stood for and becomes a follower of Christ. And now he adds these details to his resume’.

**“I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.” 2 Cor. 11:23-28**

I think we would have to say he has every reason to feel like some of us feel this morning: tired, exhausted, bored, stressed. He has every reason and excuse for just trying to kick back, he deserves to take it easy for awhile. Yet here he is, and remember he is in prison when he says this: “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” In spite of all of this, the good and the bad, all that he had suffered and endured, all that he had accomplished and achieved, he says, **“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 3:7-9**

So what was it Paul understood that we don’t? What kept him so passionate? Paul knew that this life he found in Christ was just that, a new life. Not a religion, not a creed or doctrine or belief. It was more than all of that. In fact it was not just Paul’s new life in Christ, but it was the new life of Christ in Paul. That’s what made the difference for him and makes the difference for all of us. Let me show you what I’m talking about.

I said last Sunday that we were created by Him and for him. We were created for the purpose of making him and his glory known in this world. We were created for his glory. But why did Jesus come and die on the cross for your sins? Did he do that so your sins could be forgiven and you could go to heaven? Yes, but is that all? He came to do that, but he came to do more than that. And maybe we’ve been missing out on the glorious benefits of his saving grace.

Let me paraphrase something I read this week from a message preached by Major Ian Thomas more than fifty years ago. This was the ultimate purpose of God in Christ, not that we would just be forgiven of our sins but that on the basis of that forgiveness we could be restored to a right relationship with God and become a partaker of his divine nature. We could become partakers of his life and he would live in us! Thomas said it is possible for us to go to a church service and be convicted of our sin and brought to that place where we confess our sins and we repent and receive his forgiveness but we could still miss the point of why that forgiveness is given.

Quoting from Thomas' sermon, "What did the Lord Jesus say? 'I am come that ye might have forgiveness'; was that the declared intention of the Lord Jesus? Jesus said, 'I am come that ye might have life and that ye might have it more abundantly.' (John 10:10). I haven't come that you might have forgiveness [alone], I am come that you might have life. But the only basis on which my holy Father can restore to you the life that sin has forfeited, is that your sin should be forgiven."

Thomas expresses this concern that too many people experience the forgiveness of their sins and they know that if they die they are going to heaven because of God's grace, but they never experience the great purpose for which Christ has redeemed them. He came that you might have life! Eternal life! Abundant life! We are getting at how Paul could say "for me to live is Christ." Paul understood the purpose for which he had been saved. It wasn't just to get his sins forgiven, it was so that Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit could take up residence in him and live in and through him. Jesus came that we might be made alive. Saved. Redeemed, forgiven so that we can live with his abundant life flowing in us. We've been redeemed so that the life of Christ and the love of Christ and the work of Christ would continue on touching and changing the world through us.

Remember 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.**" **Galatians 2:20.** He has come to live his life in us. He has come to make us alive by giving us this abundant life so that even when circumstances are difficult like the ones that Paul experienced, yet even in that we are triumphing, overcoming, conquering, walking in joy and grace and peace and the riches of his living presence within us. That's how

and why Paul says for me to live is Christ. Are you allowing Jesus to live through you and within you?

Listen to Major Thomas again. “Christ shed His blood upon the Cross that you, being convicted of your sins, might first repent toward God, and claim cleansing through the blood that was shed – not as an insurance policy to get you ultimately to heaven, but that your body might be present now, in total availability to the risen Christ, who by His divine Spirit claims the right not only to occupy your humanity, but to direct all its activities. This is salvation. Anything less than that is less than the Gospel as we find it in the word of God...” **“When you are in Christ, that changes your destination – heaven instead of hell. When Christ is in you, that is designed to change your destiny.”...Major W. Ian Thomas**

“But there are all too many whose destinations have been changed through the forgiveness that God vouchsafes in His mercy, whose destiny has never been changed by that yielding to His indwelling sovereignty, that makes the redeemed humanity of the forgiven sinner the vehicle of his divine life. And that is to miss [part of ] the point of the Cross.”

I know it’s a long quote and a lot of material. But what I’m trying to tell you is maybe the reason Paul could say for him to live is Christ is because he had stopped trying so hard to live for Jesus and started allowing Jesus to live in Him. We have been saved so that our sins could be forgiven so that we could be in a right relationship with God so that we could become partakers of his divine nature and so that Jesus could live in each one of us and live through each one of us.

Because Paul was in Christ through faith his destination was changed and he was headed to heaven when he died. But because Christ was in Paul, his destiny was changed and he went from being a persecutor of the church to a builder of churches and a preacher of the gospel.

Because I am in Christ by faith my destination has changed so I’m going to heaven when I die, but because Christ is in me, my destiny is changed and that means everyday I’m going to allow Jesus to live out his life through me. I’m going to allow him to speak through me and touch lives through me and give through me and encourage others through me and overcome struggles and destructive habits through me and give hope to others through me.

I know I’m just rambling this morning, but I so want to find a way to be able to say for me to live is Christ. I want his life and his light shining through me. Let me share one more quote from Major Ian Thomas. He writes, **“Regeneration. It is possible for me to come to**

**Jesus Christ and claim forgiveness on the basis of His death as an historical fact 1900 years ago, and be forgiven, yet to live my life as a Christian without any experience of the power of Jesus Christ as the risen Lord who has come to occupy my humanity, to be Himself clothed with me twenty-four hours every day. And if I claim forgiveness through the blood of Jesus Christ, without recognizing the great purpose for which God has provided forgiveness, that my body might be presented as the temple of the living God, then I cheat Jesus Christ of that for which His blood was shed, and I miss the whole point of the Cross. I claim my inheritance in Him as a forgiven sinner and anticipate a place in God's heaven, but I rob Jesus Christ of His inheritance in me. And that member of his body, baptized by the Holy Ghost into body membership, of which body He alone is the Head in heaven, is not available for His service.” ... Major Ian Thomas**

Do you get what he is saying? We've been saved, not just for the sake of having our sins forgiven, but so that as a result, Jesus can take up residence in our life and live his life through us. That's what it means to be a new creation. That's what it means for me to live in Christ. He is alive and living in me. Consequently my actions are to be his actions extended through me. My words, my conversations are to be his conversations expressed through me because he lives in me. I want us to realize he wants to live in us and when he does we are filled with his glory and his blessings and his peace and his presence and his Holy Spirit and his grace. Then we can say with rejoicing, for me to live is Christ's life living in me. For me to live is to know his heart beating with my heart, his presence invigorating the very essence of my being, my life. This is what I desire. This is what I want for us. That we become people full of the life and power and presence of Christ. That we don't waste our lives but we allow our lives to be lived out in the fullness of the Spirit and life of Christ.

I think it was Dan Betzer who told the story of a little boy many years ago who heard that the circus was coming to town. He saw posters that told of all of these wonderful things, exotic things that a country boy back before the age of television and movies could only read about and dream of. It would cost a dime to go to the circus and it was in a day when grown men were only making fifty cents a day. He asked his father if he could go and he was told if he could earn the money he could. He worked at his chores and did some deliveries and saved his pennies and finally had his dime. The train pulled into town and excitement grew. The next day the

townsfolk lined the street as the circus parade began through the heart of the little town. The boy stood there wide eyed as one by one the circus animals and performers passed by. Clowns and acrobats and jugglers, beautiful white horses, giant elephants and lions and tigers, a dancing bear, a strong man, a bearded lady, he had never seen anything like it before. It was wonderful, every moment of it.

The parade was headed to the big tent they had erected on the outskirts on the other side of the town, but the boy had no idea of the tent or where the parade was headed. He stood there until the parade passed by and then to a man standing near him he asked, “where do we pay our dime?” Seizing the opportunity the man answered, “I’ll take it”. Handing the man the dime the boy headed home, thrilled by what he had seen, unaware that he had only watched the parade go by. The real circus was under the tent.

I don’t want to be one of those who settles for the parade when there is so much more for me under the tent. I don’t want to be satisfied with my religion or my faith, I want my life to be transformed by the living presence of Christ. I don’t want to settle for anything. I don’t want my spiritual life to be boring, I want it to be animated by the very breath of God who is alive in me in the person of His Son and by his Holy Spirit. I don’t want to waste my life. I want my life to be swallowed up in his life. Come Jesus and live in me so I can say as Paul, for me to live truly is Christ!

You see, it’s not just the choice you made when you walked down the aisle and asked Jesus to forgive your sins, it’s about the choice you made this morning when you said, Jesus I’m all yours. I’m more than available – now and always come live your life in me and through me. Remember, he has come, not just so you can be forgiven but so that you can have life. You’ve been saved not just so your destination when you die is different but so that your destiny while you are here and alive is different. Let Jesus come live his life through you. That’s what it means for us to really live - it means Christ lives in us! **For me to live is Christ – our destiny, our highest purpose, our greatest pleasure!**

Are you ready for more than just forgiveness? Are you ready for the life that forgiveness secures for you? Are you ready for more than the parade? Are you ready for the whole experience? Jesus, live in me.

