

Between Two Worlds

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Bible Verse: Philippians 1:22-24
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Our materialistic world and our own carnal hearts make it easy for us to miss the spiritual matters that are given to us in Scripture. I like to say that people sometimes are so busy climbing the ladder that they never stop to consider what wall it's leaning against and some people never think about the greater issues of life. That's a problem. That's not a good thing. The routine of work, the nature of personal life, a comfortable family life satisfies them. Others on the other end of the spectrum are angry at society for perceived injustice or resent wrongs that they have suffered. Still others live with a mocking cynicism that scorns anything of beauty, anything of earnestness certainly in spiritual matters. The common thread in all of those things is a preoccupation with self and with this world. One of the delightful things about belonging to Christ is that it delivers you from that self-centered vortex and in our text this morning we're going to see how that occurs and what the fruit of that is that it produces.

I feel prompted in my heart to just say one particular thing in this context kind of leading into it. You know, from time to time I know it's certainly happened to me two or three or four times in my adult life, you're set aside for a period of time where your prior position or your prior opportunities are no longer there, maybe a health issue, maybe a job change, maybe a job loss, and you're left with a lot of time on your hands to just think and some people find that difficult to deal with. What I want to encourage you, those of you that may be in that situation, is to recognize that there is a great spiritual opportunity in those times to be able to step back from these other things of the world and contemplate eternal matters that when your mind is free to give deeper thought to them. God intends that time, that period of setback, to be a blessing to you to bring spiritual good to you, and it's simply a matter of knowing the direction to give your heart and to think about things at a deeper level, not simply waiting for the trial to pass sometimes with gritted teeth, but rather to say, "Okay, I've got time on my hands here. Let me read Scripture in a little more devoted way perhaps, find some really worthy books to give my attention to, and rather than tending to a job or tending to others, let me tend to the matters of my heart and give opportunity to that." And so often it's easy in our preoccupation with the world to miss the very fact that those times where there's not as much to do and where people aren't calling your name for you to be their help and strength and guide, that there is spiritual opportunity there and I want to help you kind of think through those things in our brief time here together this morning.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ tells us that God loved unworthy sinners just like you enough to send his Son into the world to save them from their sin. Jesus Christ lived a perfect life on our behalf and he offered that perfect life as a sacrifice to God in the place of sinners like you and me so the price of our sin would be paid on our behalf as a gift, as an unprompted gift from a loving gracious God of eternal love, and God accepted the sacrifice of his Son as shown by the fact that he raised Christ from the dead and now a holy God gladly welcomes and receives and forgives everyone who believes in Jesus Christ for their personal salvation, for the forgiveness of their sins, who trust him for the promise of eternal life that is offered in the Gospel of Christ. And it's a marvelous offer. It's a gracious thing even for people who never believe, it's a grace of God for them to hear even of this Gospel because God offers this grace and extends this grace without regard to sex, without regard to race, without regard to wealth or anything of social standing or consideration whatsoever. Jesus Christ is the one and only Savior of the world. No man is excluded from the offer of the Gospel found in Christ and no one enters into heaven apart from personal faith and repentance from sin in Christ.

Now those are familiar truths. We try to go over those often here at Truth Community Church but as you grow in Christ, my brothers, my sisters in Christ, you should be finding something happening inside your heart about your perspective, about your worldview. Those familiar truths that we just rehearsed again change the entire way that you view all of life when you properly understand them, when you take the time to meditate on them and to think through them in a right and biblical way. The Gospel, beloved, redefines life for you. Life is completely different now. The whole reason that you live, the whole purpose of your existence has been changed and why you live has been changed, and sometimes it just takes a supernatural pause button on life, an enforced time of silence, an enforced time of inactivity for us to really be able to drink that in and to consider it, and not only has the purpose of life been redefined for us, the meaning of death has been transformed for us as well.

Now we have seen this in Philippians in the thought of the Apostle Paul and I invite you to turn to Philippians 1:21, and I would have you know as you're turning there for those of you that are in those pauses of life of various different sources, I would have you know that we pray for you through those times, we know it's difficult, we know that there are spiritual and physical challenges that many of you are facing, and we sympathetically pray and lift your names before the throne of God that he would be gracious to you in this time in your life, and I think that the things from God's word here this morning are a part of that for you, an opportunity to take your spiritual life to another level of serious thought and devotion and consideration that changes the way that you approach the remainder of the life that the Lord gives to you. So it's with complete sympathy that I offer these things to you this morning from God's word.

In Philippians 1:21, the Apostle Paul said,

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

What we saw in the last couple of weeks when we looked at this verse and broke it down, is that Paul is saying that, "My every life affection is set upon Jesus Christ. That is the preeminent love of my heart. It is the preeminent priority of my life. I live for Him and I find all of my identity in Him. I find every purpose, every meaning to life is given to me by Christ and is found in Him." So that matters of activity or inactivity are secondary to the presence of Christ in his life. Let me remind you at this time as you're reading these words that in a sense, I don't want to make too much of this, but in a sense Paul himself was in a time in life here where he had been set aside. He was in prison. He did not have freedom of movement. He was still actively ministering as people would come to him and he would receive them, as the end of Acts tells us. He was still writing letters to churches. He was still very actively ministering. But in terms of being able to go out and about like he normally did, this had been taken away from him providentially and he was now sitting with much time on his hands from that perspective, and in the course of that pause in his life, in his life activity, come these great words that he says and his every life affection is set upon his Savior. And for all of us, sometimes, you know, life gets really busy, we lose sight of this and I know I am repeating myself here but I just think it's very important to say, an opportunity where life slows down for you even dramatically slows down for you, is a great spiritual opportunity if you take advantage of it and consider the things that are being set forth for us from God's word here this morning.

But not only has life been transformed by your salvation, by your conversion to Christ, is that death itself is transformed as well. Death is no longer that dark place of fear for the Christian who has thought through these issues of what the Gospel means, death now is transformed from that dark unknown to the mere passageway that delivers the believer in Christ into his very presence. Death takes us from this broken world and our broken bodies and our broken hearts and our carnal minds, and delivers us into the presence of Christ where sin is removed and we are free to enjoy his presence forever without diminishment and without the tears of life and the sins of our heart weighing us down. To have an uncluttered view of him, to have an uncluttered sense of his presence at the moment of death makes death what Paul says there, look at it at the end of verse 21 with me, he says, "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." Well, I ask you if you've ever really thought about death from that perspective? Maybe you're a newer Christian, you haven't had the opportunity to really think through these things but I want to tell you that this changes the way that you think about all of life. Life now here in this physical life given over to the affections and service of Christ with an exclusivity of priority that transcends anything that you ever could have known beforehand, delivered from that selfish vortex of life that it's all about me and what I think, and then to consider death not as something that holds fear for us but that which gives us an advantage that we don't have in this life, it gives us an advantage of being delivered into the presence of the one loved our souls and gave himself for us and to be with him forever. You see, this is utterly contrary to the way that the world thinks and these new realities of life and death transform your whole perspective on life.

Now maybe you're in the midst of the busyness of life and jobs and activities and family and all of that don't give you much time for personal reflection, there's still opportunity

for you here in these things as well, but for all of us I just want to lay out this text of our sermon this morning in Philippians 1:22-24 is our text for this morning. Paul said,

22 But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. 23 But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; 24 yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.

Well, what does this have to teach us here this morning? Well, just remember Paul is in prison facing possible execution. At the time that he wrote this, he did not know whether he would live much longer or not and it raises the question, then, how does a Christian face the issues of duty and death at a time of crisis when life has changed and when life is on the line? Well, here in the words of the Apostle Paul we find our answer and he's making a contrast, he's making a comparison with what he is saying here. He is comparing the present life and the benefit of the present life with his future life in Christ and the reality of death; he's comparing life with death and the benefits that there are from each one with and for the Christian. So we're just going to take a few moments here this morning to look at this and to consider it, and this is part of what we think through in those times where we've been set aside; this is what gives us an opportunity to bring clarity to our hearts going forward in the remainder of the time that the Lord may give to us.

So let's just consider point 1 here this morning, the first side of the contrast: the benefit of continuing this life. The benefit of continuing this life and Paul expresses what his goal would be if God allowed him to live and in verse 22, he expresses it. He says, "If I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose." Now he had just said at the end of verse 21, "to die is gain," it's going to be an advantage to me, but then he goes to another side, there's another part of his heart, he says, "But," and he's got something else that's considering and weighing on his mind here, he says, "Yeah, it'll be an advantage to me if I die. I'll be in the immediate presence of Christ, that will be glorious. But it's not that simple for me," he says, "because if I continue to live in the flesh," by which he means this physical life, if his physical life continues, he says, "there's going to be fruitful labor that comes from that." The longer he lives, the more time he's going to have for ministry, the more time he's going to have to consider and to continue his apostolic ministry to the churches and to individuals and to evangelize the lost that were coming to him. Remember he had said earlier in the epistle that the whole household of Caesar was coming to know the Gospel, the praetorian guard in verse 13 was coming to know the cause of Christ because of his imprisonment. So here's what's happening, he is set aside from a human perspective, a very narrow limited human perspective, but it's advancing the Gospel to those that hadn't heard. He's continuing in ministry to others and he says, "If I remain on in life, that kind of valuable service to Christ is going to continue. I will continue to be used by God to minister to my fellow believers and minister to the lost." So he's torn. He's torn in two. He says, "I'm hard-pressed from both directions because there are benefits either way. The benefit in this life, continued fruitful ministry that will abound to the good of those who hear. The

benefit of death for me personally, to be in the presence of Christ, being with Christ is the ultimate goal of my life. That's why I exist. He's everything to me. So to depart and be with him is everything." So he comes and he lays these things out and look at it there at the end of verse 22, he says, "I don't know which to choose." It could be understood as him saying, "I'm not going to say what I think about that choice. You know, while dying is gain for me and the consummation of the goal for me, I'll have fruitful labor if I continue to live." And this fruitful labor refers to that useful ministry, souls will be won to Christ, believers will be edified. Continued life means continued ministry and that would be good.

So Paul just wants to be released from prison and continue to live and continue to minister, right? Why would you not want that? And I would venture to say that for many of us, of believers, we often stop there even when we're thinking in these terms of serving Christ and ministering to others, serving Christ in his church, serving Christ with our families, with our unsaved circle of influence, and we think about it like that and that's good, that's all good but there's another dimension to the impact of the Gospel that makes the way that we view the future not quite so simple. It's not quite that simple for the one who loves Christ and when Paul says, "I don't know which to choose," he's showing that there is a tension in play. Of course the apostle wants his ministry to continue. Of course he wants that to be fruitful. And of course that's good. And none of us would sit and criticize him if that's where his heart landed on. But if we simply stopped there, beloved, what I'm laboring to help you see is that we haven't completely thought through the Christian position, what it means to be a believer in Christ if we simply stopped there and we're just satisfied at that point. Well, why does this have to be complicated? Why do we even bother thinking like this? Why do we go here? Well, in part we go here because it's in the word of God and so we're meant to consider it, but the benefit of continuing in this life is the opportunity that it gives to us to minister on behalf of Christ, to proclaim him, to make him known, to serve his people.

So this is why we live, to live is Christ, not about the pursuit of our career goals or other things that occupy our attention, not to become the next level master of our favored video game or anything. The lofty thought here of the Apostle Paul has a way of making every other human pursuit seem really trivial by comparison, doesn't it, and that should happen to us. We should think this way. We should contemplate this. We should be asking, "What am I giving my life to in light of the Gospel?" That's a right and good question to ask because it has implications.

But to Paul there's a second aspect, the other side of the contrast is the benefit that there is of departing this life. The benefit of departing this life. How could there be any benefit? How could you leave behind fruitful ministry and even want and contemplate wanting to do that? Well, look at verse 23 with me again. He had said in verse 21, "to die is gain," and now in verse 23 he says, "But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better." Paul says, "I'm hard-pressed. I'm between a rock and a hard place in my heart. I can't tell you what I think about it because I'm torn. On the one hand love for the people of Christ makes me want to stay, but on the other hand if I depart this life, I enter into the presence of Christ and

every aspiration of my heart, every highest aspiration of my heart finds its final fulfillment, and as long as I stay here, I don't get that highest fulfillment but if I get that highest fulfillment, then I'm not able to minister like I would otherwise choose to do. I don't know what to think." His ongoing strong desire is to leave this life and be with Christ, to have death usher him into the immediate conscious presence of Christ, and it's right there, beloved, that I want to call timeout, hit the pause button, whatever metaphor helps you think about, you know, stopping and pausing to consider something. I'm asking you, it's a genuine question, a sympathetic question, one designed for your spiritual good, I'm asking you whether you've thought about death seriously enough to be in this realm of thought that Paul is expressing? Are you aware of the biblical teaching that says the believer in Christ enters immediately into the presence of Christ? Do you know that and do you believe it, that's the starting point. Paul knew this truth. Paul believed this truth. He was certain of it. This is what was creating the dilemma in his mind. Well, I wonder whether how many of us even have any sense of that dilemma to us, and to the extent that maybe you've never really felt that tug, maybe you haven't really thought through the implications of salvation and what death does for the believer. You see, Christ saved you not to give you a great life now. It's not pre-eminently about what happens in this brief window of life. Man is born for trouble as the sparks fly upward. Life isn't always going to be very good or pleasant and the older you get, the more you realize that, right?

So we find as we're considering these things, that we need to recognize that we were saved preeminently for a life that is yet to come and that what we love is not preeminently, not first and foremost the things that we are doing or the things that we have or the relationships in this life, the first and preeminent priority is Christ and for the true believer, the real Christian, the idea of being with Christ triumphs over everything else. It surpasses everything else in value.

Now why would that be? Why would Christ be so much better even than your dearest spouse or your dearest children or the things that you enjoy here in life? Well, it's the difference between the infinity and finite, the sinless and the sinful, that which is eternal versus that which is temporary. But even more than that, beloved, and here we're thinking through things here, we're considering the implications of the Gospel here. In the name of Jesus Christ, what we're recognizing is that there is a unique place that he holds for us. He is the one who saved our soul. He is the one who loved us before the foundation of time. He is the one who thought of us in our sins on the cross and bore the penalty so that we would not have to. And that does something in the believer's heart to think of these things, he realizes how greatly surpassing Christ is to everything else in existence to us. He has done for us what no man could ever do. He has loved us like the most faithful of spouse never could. He has loved us with an eternal, sacrificial, infinite, great, sovereign love that is the highest of all loves and the believing heart recognizes that about him and longs to be with the one who loved him the most, who loved him the greatest, who did the most for him or her. And you see, the idea of being with him exclusively when you've thought through who he is and what he has done, the idea of being with him exclusively suddenly takes on a sweet and magnificent perspective, a desire that to say, "To be with the one who loved me the most has to be the ultimate destination and the thing that I want the most out of my existence." And what I'm asking you to do and asking you to consider

is whether you've thought through it enough that you see the comparison that Paul is making here. He's comparing a fruitful life, a good life on earth from a ministry perspective for him anyway, and he says, "Even a fruitful life on earth pales in comparison to being with my Savior in His immediate presence, free from the constraints of this world, free from sin and just free to glorify Him forever. In that contrast, in that comparison, Christ far outweighs and far surpasses it all."

I can remember a time in life when I didn't see it that way. I can remember when I had friends that were more important to me than Christ, and I remember saying, this was long before I had even met Nancy, I remember saying to friends, "You know, I like it so much here, I'm not even in a hurry to get to heaven. This is really great." I said that as a young believer, said it as a believer but as a young one. Now I look back on that, if I could go back 35 years and talk to young Don that way, I would just talk to him and I'd say, "You dumb fool. Do you realize what you're saying? You're saying that you prefer some things on earth to Christ? What's the matter with you? Why would that be in your heart? Why would you say something like that? Are you so unaware that you say that without shame?" Yeah, I did. I'm ashamed of it now but I don't see it that way anymore. I love my wife. I love my family. I love all of you. I'm grateful for what the Lord has given to me but when the trumpet sounds, sounds the note of my name, "See you later. I'm going to what I've been born for. I'm going to what I've been saved for. I'm going to what I've been eternally appointed for without regret because to be with Christ is very much better." And you see, in the midst of the adversity of life, adversity in life has a way of weaning your affections from this world, helping you to realize, "Do you know what? This world isn't all that it's cracked up to be after all. And what's to come is so much, so very much better that I just want to go. If I could jump, I'd jump into it because being with Christ is very much better compared to the conflicts of life on earth and the sin in my heart and all of that." You see, beloved fellow believer, what I'm asking you to do is to consider and to think about Christ here in this hour and to think about how sweet and precious and preeminent he is, and to take steps in your heart and the moving of your affections and the moving of your will to a place where you love him like that as well. Like Paul says here, to be with Christ is very much better than anything here on earth because Christ is the essence of life for him, so much so that even fruitful apostolic ministry for Paul paled in comparison to it all.

So he has this tension in his heart as he's writing these things to his Philippian friends. Well, what's the resolution of it? Well, first of all, recognize that Paul here, there's an obvious presupposition here that his future is in God's hands, and what happens to him is going to be at the hands of the unfolding providence of God. He's not questioning that. He's just not in that realm right now talking about my future is in God's hands, he's in a different realm, he's expressing what the desires of his heart are. He's opening up his heart to his Philippian friends and he's baring his soul to them saying, "This is what's going on in my heart as a believing Christian. I love ministry, I love being able to be a servant to the people of God but I love Christ even more and I want to be with Him, and my life is uncertain right now, I don't know what's going to happen, it's hard for me to even know what would be my preference," because there's a benefit to continuing in this life and there's a benefit to death that he has. And I trust and I can only trust the work of

the Spirit in your heart now here today because it's time to move on in the text, but I just trust that the Spirit of God has helped you see something of what even causes the conflict, that a love for Christ makes him view this world differently in a way that he could readily leave it if it were the Lord's time for him to leave so that he could go and be with the one who is the ultimate love of his and the ultimate lover of his soul.

So that's kind of heavy stuff but it's all good stuff. So how does his heart find resolution, then? How does he resolve this tension and this is going, this opens up a whole different world to us. It is amazing to me how much stuff is in Philippians, how profound the thought thought is that underlies this seemingly simple epistle that brings so much joy to so many hearts. There's so much undergirding it and after having expressed the contrast in verses 22 and 23, I want to show you the resolution which is found in the priority of love, the priority of love to him. Paul is pivoting now, in a sense, he's opened his heart and he's expressed these internal dynamics that are going on in his own mind and in his own affections and you see something of the value and the benefit of life and ministry versus death and the presence of Christ, and you see that there are good things to be said about both. What unifies Paul in his approach, then, going forward, now he's pivoting from that which is in his heart and he starts to look outside for the explanation and the resolution in his heart and how he moves forward from his own personal time of being set aside, and it's found in the priority of love. Paul in the midst of this, in the midst of knowing that death is better for him personally, he does something that is just utterly amazing. He refuses to view his life in isolation. He looks beyond what his personal preference is and what is best for him. He recognizes that in his life, in his apostolic ministry there are others at stake. There are people who need him and he loves them.

Look at verse 24. He says, "yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake." He says, he's saying just by way of summary here, he's saying, "Yes, I recognize that for me personally when I die and go to be with Christ, that's going to be a great personal advantage to me. That is going to be gain. That is going to be a wonderful change for me." But he stops and he continues in his thinking here and he realizes, he says if I can paraphrase, he says, "But do you know what? I'm not the only one, I'm not the only one at stake here. This isn't just about me. I'm an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. I'm a servant of Him." And he says, "For me to live on in the flesh, for my life to continue a time longer, that's more necessary, that's more important even than what I most want." You see, he's expressing the reality that at that time the church of Jesus Christ had critical needs on earth that the Apostle Paul was in a position to meet. Paul was in a position to help these Philippians and to strengthen them in their faith. He was in a position to write more New Testament letters and to do more to strengthen the churches of his day, and what he says is, "For me, it'll be better for me in heaven. But do you know what," he says, "Heaven can wait. Heaven can wait. I'll get there soon enough. I'll enjoy and I'll be able to enjoy that presence of Christ for eternity. There is a window of time right here where there are things that only I can do and that if I leave prematurely, if the Lord took me now, these things, these needs that you have would be unmet."

So he tells these Philippians, "My greatest heart desire personally is that I could be with Christ," and yet then he tells them that, "it's more important for me to stay with you for

your sake." That is incredible. That's amazing. This is the final destination of the humble Christian heart. Living on in life means fruitful labor for me, amen. Dying and going to heaven, that's even better. But do you know what? It's not just about me, I've got to step back and I've got to consider the people around me. So my perspective on life is renewed to give myself in love to the people who need me, so much so that I recognize that they have a claim on me that makes my personal desire for heaven one that can be postponed. It'll come soon enough but there is a priority of love that's even more important than what I most want and desire in my heart.

Oh my, there's so much here. There's so much here. You understand, right, that what Paul wanted more than anything, in one sense, was to be with Christ. He knew that was the best thing, that was the ultimate destination, that was where he would find the ultimate fulfillment, and it'll be better for him there. And yet – oh, this is far more important than it might seem to you in a moment – and yet what Paul does is he yields his personal desire, he subordinates his personal desire, he subjugates his personal desire for the spiritual needs of others, and in that he is reflecting what the love of Christ is like for us.

What did Christ do? Christ did the exact same thing only in reverse geography, if I can put it that way. Christ existing in the glories of heaven said, "I can set this aside for a time," and comes down to earth in order to carry out his earthly ministry that made the Gospel possible, better stated, that implemented the Gospel, that accomplished the Gospel for his people, redemption accomplished and applied, as the book by John Murray is titled. And Christ loved his people sufficiently to leave what was better for him personally in heaven to come to earth and live a life that was entirely geared toward sacrifice, to die a death that was entirely a sacrifice, entirely against his self-interest for the sake of the people that he would redeem. Now here's his apostle in his sanctified state of mind now writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in what he says, and Paul rather than going to heaven stays on earth in his heart. Why? For the people of Christ. Christ loved his people unto death, Paul loved them enough to want to continue to live even though it would be better for him if he died.

My Christian friends, that's how you and I are to view life and death. That's our perspective on it all. We think about life from our own personal perspective in our own relationships and how much we cherish these things, there should be an element ever-growing in your thinking that these things are secondary to me compared to Christ. It doesn't mean – oh, let me just say this and emphasize it – it doesn't mean that you love the people here on earth less because you love Christ more, it just means that you've got your head screwed on right. It just means that your heart is where it's supposed to be. I have two grandchildren that I think are just adorable and I love them to death, but they are never going to supplant Christ in my affections, nor should they.

So there's just so much here on life but compared to Christ, it's all diminished in perspective. There's a higher motivation. I want to be with Christ and death will bring me there and that sounds really good, you've got a high motivation, a higher motivation and then there's this highest motivation of them all, the fact that this life that God has given to me is meant to be offered up as a sacrifice for the benefit of his people and for the benefit

of evangelizing those that don't know him yet, so that this idea of love, of giving, Paul giving himself for the sake of the people of Christ and for the sake of the lost, transcends even his desire to be with Christ. It's a principle of love, a priority of love that is motivating him above all else. Paul recognized that he had time to minister to the circle of influence that God had given to him and he said, "But yet how much more I long for Christ." And then he says, he says, "But love for people, love for the people of Christ transcends even that." In his selfless approach to the desires of his heart illustrates and paves the way for what he is about to say in chapter 2.

Look at it with me. We'll get there soon enough, maybe next month here in chapter 2. Paul says in verse 1, he says, "Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose." Now look at verse 3 with this fresh perspective from what he has said in chapter 1. He says, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." Paul writes that from a heart that had settled that in the most ultimate of senses. "It's better for me to be with Christ and yet I'll subordinate even that to the fact that I have opportunity to minister to you with continued life, and I'll gladly accept that. I embrace that. It's more necessary for your sake." Can you imagine being on the receiving end of an epistle like that? Can you imagine having a man like the Apostle Paul show forth what is so clearly true, that it's better for him to be with Christ and yet he says, "I prefer your well-being to my own." You see, beloved, that's the spirit of true Christianity. Christ preferred your well-being, your eternal well-being to his own well-being. That's why he gave his life on the cross. He sacrificed for you. Paul here in his heart settles his desires and says, "I'll sacrifice my desire for heaven for you." Now for us, for you and me here today, what we find is that this is the destination of love that every Christian heart is intended to come to, setting aside selfish desires, setting aside selfish ambition, setting aside whole life objectives for the sake of serving Christ, loving him and serving his people.

Look at 1 Corinthians 13 with me in this context. Embedded in this love chapter is the same principle of love that we're talking about here. 1 Corinthians 13:4, Paul says, "Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly," here it is, beloved, "it does not seek its own, it does not seek its own, is not provoked, it does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails." And he goes on and at the end of verse 13 he says, at the end of the chapter in verse 13 he says, "But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love."

So Christian, I ask you as we bring this to a close this morning, do you see life from a perspective of the fact that it's your opportunity for ministry? That's a high aspiration. Do you see the higher aspiration to die to depart and be with Christ and how that will be very much better for you and transcends all your earthly affections? That's great but then we

find this highest aspiration that says, "In my heart I'm content even to wait to be with Christ if it gives me opportunity to minister to the needs of the people of God and to minister to the needs, the evangelistic needs of those who are lost." I ask you, my friends, do you love Christ enough to want to be with him above all else and above everyone else? And do you love his church enough to wait to serve him while you can?

Let's pray together.

Our Father, these are magnificent realities and we see that in Christ we see the ultimate manifestation of these things, that Christ did not regard His place in heaven as a thing to be grasped but emptied himself taking the form of a bondservant and being made in the likeness of men and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. O Lord Jesus, how You gave of Yourself in this first and greatest way. We love You for it. We long to be with You. But if you tell us that our time is not yet to be with You, then we gladly give ourselves over to the service of You, to the service of Your people, to the service of the Gospel. Help us sort through these things in our mind that our affections would be rightly placed, that our love for the things of this world would increasingly diminish, that our affections for the things of heaven would ever grow to the fruit that You would have them to be. Father, I confess I am sorry for those times in the past where I thought more of this life than being with You. I know that others have no doubt had those emotions in their own heart, Father. We confess that such thoughts are not worthy of You. Our highest goal, our highest love is Christ Himself and from that position that You have brought us into by faith, O God, help us to sort out our priorities going forward in life that we might give ourselves to those things of highest value while we patiently wait for You to send forth Your angels, as it were, to bring us home to that heavenly place that will be better than all else. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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