

I. Introduction:

- A. I hope that you can see some similarities between these verses and the turmoil of life today.
1. More importantly, I hope that you can see some parallels between Paul's situation and attitude – and yours.
 2. **Verse 12** – *"I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel."*
 3. What has happened to America over the last two weeks has been just short of incredible.
 - a. I'm not talking about the virus, because there are – and have been – other plagues in this country far worse than this – other diseases, the murder epidemic and, of course, millions of abortions.
 - b. I'm referring to the government shut down of everything from sports – to business – to churches.
 4. One of the effects of this, as far as churches are concerned, is that people, sequestered in their homes, have turned to the internet for spiritual nourishment.
 5. Churches which would never have considered reaching out through the internet a month ago, are going on-line by the hundreds.
 6. And many bored and frightened shut-ins are hearing the gospel for the first time in their lives.
- B. But without a doubt unwise ethernet surfers can find every kind of religion and false faith imaginable.
1. There is heresy and religious ungodliness behind every page of those search engines.
 2. And *"some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife" – "with contention, not sincerely."*
 3. But, thankfully, others, out of love for Christ and suffering souls, preach the gospel of free grace.
 4. No doubt, some preachers and churches are using the internet to line their pockets.
 5. They have set up links and other means, urging people to send to them their tithes and offerings.
 6. But, hopefully Christ is being glorified by many, using this confinement and it's limitations to the best possible effect.
- C. Paul was in Rome under house arrest when he wrote this letter.
1. And although he expected to be released and to return to his former ministry, just as we expect to be released from ours, there was the possibility that he might die before leaving Rome.
 2. Just because we have been hiding behind closed doors for a week or two, that doesn't mean we have not already been exposed to this virus before our house arrest.
 3. You and I may be living under a new and unexpected death sentence, just as Paul referred to the possibility of his execution.
 4. **Verse 20** – *"According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."*
 5. Then he added – *"For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you."*
- D. In the midst of the gloomy thoughts of possible death, he mentions another subject – **"life."**
1. And it is that subject which has caught my attention for this evening. *"For to me to LIVE is Christ."*
 2. Lay aside the fact that we all stand on the verge, marge or edge of death.
 - a. That is true with – or without – Covid-19.
 - b. What about that high blood pressure of yours, and your high cholesterol?
 - c. Haven't you noticed the brakes in your car behaving a little screwy recently?
 3. *"Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" – James 4:14.*
- E. In so many ways our **lives** are like vapours – **clouds**.
1. They have the **substance** of clouds; the changing **shape** of clouds; the **beauty** & the **ugliness** of clouds.
 2. But I remind you that God holds every cloud in the palm of His hand; they go and do whatsoever He wills.
 3. And that brings us back to my text for this evening, *"For to me to live is Christ."*
 4. For a few minutes forget the negativity in context & consider the positive – *"For to me to LIVE is Christ."*

II. That was not ALWAYS the case for Paul – or it was not EXACTLY the case.

- A. It is true that in Jehovah *“we live, and move, and have our being”* – **Acts 17:28**.
1. And it is true that Christ *“is before all things and in Him all things consist”* – **Colossians 1:17**.
 2. There is a sense in which we enjoy **physical life** because God in grace provides it, and in mercy He has not yet extinguished it.
 3. *“For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible”* – including your body and soul.
 4. But there is another sense in which **spiritually** we live, and we all move in **another sphere** as well.
 5. *“In times past (we all) walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.”*
 6. There is an extended period in every life when *“we were of our father the Devil, and the lusts of our father we have done.”*
- B. And that was certainly the case with Paul, who said ...
1. *“I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;*
 - a. *Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.*
 - b. *And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.*
 - c. *This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.”*
 2. He said to the Corinthians, *“I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God”* – **1 Corinthians 15:9**.
- C. But there was a day when that **old** Paul, then known as *“Saul,”* died and was resurrected in Christ.
1. Saul was born-again outside the city of Damascus and immediately began to live a **new** life.
 2. He died – that is, he came to know himself to be spiritually dead – and the new life which began at that point was not his own but the life of Christ within him.
 3. Shortly thereafter, he was immersed in water as an illustration of his death and resurrection in Christ.
 4. From that day forward he knew that *“for him to live – was Christ.”*
 5. But what did he mean by that statement?

III. In its most elemental aspects, Christ had given – and was still giving him – spiritual life.

- A. I realize that it is contrary to common secular thought...
1. But the Bible declares, and Christians know, that every moment of physical life is a gift of God.
 2. In speaking of Christ, Paul said in **Colossians 1:16-17** – *“For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, & that are in earth, visible & invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, & for him: And he is before all things, & by him all things consist.”*
 3. By the will of God through Christ and the Holy Spirit – *“all things CONSIST.”*
 4. The Greek word *“sunistao”* (*soon-is-tah'-o*) speaks of things *“coming or being together.”*
 5. In addition to His government of the universe, it is through the grace and mercy of the Lord that body and soul remain together – that we have physical life.
- B. By this point in his life Paul had been through things worse than Covid-19 **and** your most recent heart attack.
1. He reminded the Corinthians – *“Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.”*

2. He said I have been *“in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths off.”* And on one occasion he was even pronounced *“dead.”*
 3. Yet, years later, there he was in Rome writing to the Philippians, because Christ was sustaining his life.
 4. I could go on pointing to other people, other situations, and other scriptures which illustrate this point.
 5. You are alive today, because the Lord has been, and continues to be, merciful and gracious towards you.
 6. But since that is not my primary point, and since it is not as important as others, I will move on.
- C. Just as the Lord was sustaining, or *“consisting”* Paul’s **physical life**, so was He doing it with his **spiritual life**.
1. In **John 10** the Lord Jesus gives us His great message on the Good Shepherd and His sheep.
 2. In **verse 15** he says, *“I lay down my life for the sheep.”*
 3. That could, and does, mean that Christ died for the salvation of His sheep – those he intended to save.
 4. But in **verse 28** He adds, *“And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.”*
 5. The *“eternal life”* about which He was speaking was actually His own life, shared with his chosen sheep.
 - a. It was not some external blessing, especially created to be shared with the sheep.
 - b. It was the Shepherd’s own life – the eternal life of the eternal Son of God.
 6. In **Colossians 3:4**, Paul says, *“When Christ, who IS our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.”*
- D. I don’t know how to adequately express it –
1. Christ did not simply give us everlasting life, the way our mothers gave us temporary, physical life.
 2. Christ actually **IS** our eternal life.
 3. With an extremely stupid statement, I say, *“If Christ somehow died then we would all be instantly dead – physically and spiritually.”*
 4. It is a stupid statement because Christ is the eternal Son of God and cannot die.
 5. But if – if He died, we’d instantly less than dust.
 6. Paul **meant that** when he said, *“for to me to live is Christ”* – but he **also meant more** than that.

IV. Christ was also the aim and business of Paul’s life.

- A. Perhaps you have not considered it, but one of the potential evil results of today’s epidemic is the possibility of child and spousal abuse.
1. There are some men who are being forced to spend 16 hours a day with their families, when ordinarily it’s not more than 3 or 4. And some of those men can’t handle it.
 2. Some men, whose lives are usually consumed with their jobs, are locked out of their places of work.
 3. Some men, who ordinarily cannot talk about anything beyond sports, are all of a sudden forced to talk to their wives and children, and they have nothing to say.
 4. The other day, I asked a friend about a woman who recently retired.
 - a. I was told that she had recently been spending 12 hours a day at one of the casinos.
 - b. But now she has to stay home, and she’s having a hard time with it.
 5. The focus of some people’s lives is pointed in an evil direction, and the total emptiness of their existence is becoming clear.
 6. For them to live is partying at the tavern; for them to live is football; for them to live is the casino.
 7. And these things no longer are available to them, and as a result some of those people are becoming dangerous to themselves and the people around them.
- B. Paul, as a representative saint of God, could say that his life was Christ.
1. His life was not about pleasing his boss, paying the bills, or even keeping food on the table.
 2. His eye was on the one who said, *“Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?”*
 3. Paul was not worried about the bubonic plague, the black death or the corona virus.
 4. The primary aim of his life was to *“seek... the kingdom of God and his righteousness.”*

- C. I'm not implying that the apostle cared for nothing else, because obviously he did.
1. When he wrote to the Corinthians about his beatings, shipwrecks and other perils, he added, *"beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches."*
 2. Paul saw the needs of lost souls; it grieved him that his friends grieved; he hurt when they were suffering.
 3. He chose not to be a burden to some churches, so he worked with his hands in secular employment.
 4. But in the midst of the cares and chores of ordinary life, the primary aim and purpose of his life was Christ.
 5. With the agreement of his own heart he could exhort us – *"Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God."*
 6. *"For to me to live is Christ."*

V. When Paul made that statement I'm sure that it also meant – there was no room for anyone else.

- A. He had no other god's before him – none to compete or to go along with Jehovah and Christ his Saviour.
1. The mother of Jesus was not the co-executrix of Paul's salvation or the co-governor of his service.
 2. No other saint or apostle was the overseer of any part of Paul's life.
 3. He didn't have to ask permission from his bishop, his wife, or some pastor emeritus before preaching.
 4. He didn't have to consult the local constitution or city by-laws before speaking out on abortion, homosexuality or capital punishment.
- B. *"For to me to live is Christ"* and there is none else.
1. Either the Lord had revealed that to Paul, or else, like us, he learned it from reading his Bible.
 2. The Lord told Cyrus and Isaiah, *"I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else"* – **Isaiah 45:5-6.**

VI. *"For to me to live is Christ"* could mean *"Christ is the end of my life."*

- A. I wonder what the infant mortality rate was at the time of Paul's birth?
1. I have read that a century ago 1 in every 10 babies died at the time of their birth – 10%.
 2. Today that number is .03% – that is, when the number of abortions are not calculated into the equation.
 3. How many babies did Paul's mother lose before and after he was born?
 4. Whatever the number was, I am absolutely sure that it was God's will that he survive and mature.
 5. God was there at the **beginning** of Paul's **earthly life**, protecting him.
- B. And in reading the fascinating story of Paul's conversion we clearly see that **the Lord was there** at the **beginning** of his **spiritual life** as well.
1. That's a foolish statement isn't it?
 2. But it is a fact that many religious people think that becoming a Christian is as human a decision as joining the army or becoming a member of the *"Loyal Order of Water Buffalo."*
 3. Bible Christianity is not a human religion. It is a life. It is *"Christ in me, the hope of glory."*
 4. And at its roots, the commencement of that life is no more a conscious choice of ours than where, when and to whom we were born.
 5. Yes, the true Christian must repent before God and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, but he can do these things – he does these things – because he has been born-again by the Spirit of God.
- C. More importantly for Paul and the Christian – *"for to me to live is Christ"* means that Christ is also there at the end of my earthly life.
1. As you probably know, thus far, I have only been quoting the first part of **Philippians 1:21.**
 2. In its entirety, Paul says, *"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."*
 3. In the midst of all today's doom and gloom, I actually would prefer to de-emphasize death.
 4. But I can't do that completely because, after all, it is the theme of this Biblical paragraph.

- D. Paul is not saying that in the process of dying there is gain – which of course is the truth for the Christian.
1. He is saying that when death has finished its God-intended work, there is nothing but gain for the child of God.
 2. He adds a few verses later, *“to depart (is) to be with Christ.”*
- E. Let’s say you have a Christian friend in the hospital with the virus.
1. He is deteriorating; continuing to deteriorate. He is getting weaker by the hour.
 2. He painfully gasps for every breath, and his convulsive breaths are felt by your soul as well.
 3. For him to depart and to be with Christ would be a blessing – perhaps a blessing to both of you.
- F. But there is *“gain”* and there is *“great gain.”*
1. There is a difference between the value of a paper dollar, a silver dollar and a gold dollar.
 2. For a Christian, like Paul, to leave behind a painful life through death would be gain.
 3. But more specifically *“to depart and to be with Christ”* is the greatest of all gains.
 4. To leave a tumbled-down shack, moving into a mansion, would be an upgrade.
 5. To leave a sin-cursed body, entering into a glorified and eternal body is an upgrade.
 6. And for your spouse to close her eyes after looking into your face, to open them looking upon the Saviour would be a great gain for her.
- G. Paul said, *“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”*
1. Can **you** say that this evening?
 2. Can you say – come what may, I am ready to stand before my Saviour?
 3. Can you say that you are living your life for Christ today, and spending tomorrow in His spiritually/physical presence will be better?
 4. What I am asking is – are you a child of God by faith in Christ Jesus?
 5. God’s people can say, *“I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.”*