

Please turn with me in your copies of God's Word to Philippians chapter 1. If you recall, Paul is writing this letter to be an encouragement to the saints in Philippi. It is not a letter of admonition, though he does give some admonishments in it. It is not a letter of rebuke, though there are some points in which the Philippian Church was to be corrected. No, this is a letter of encouragement and joy. In our text this morning Paul is encouraging these saints to find joy in Christ no matter the circumstance. Hear now the Word of our Lord from Philippians chapter 1, and I will be reading verses 19 through 26.

Read Philippians 1:19-26

Pray

Here in our text this morning we come to one of the most familiar verses not only in this letter but in all of Scripture. Paul says, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." We oftentimes use this verse as a sort of mantra, a maxim for the Christian life. And it is true that this is a maxim for the Christian life. Every one of us ought to be able to say with the Apostle, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." When we consider the context in which Paul speaks these words, we begin to gain a greater appreciation for them. Paul is sitting in a Roman prison, feet fast in stocks, unsure whether or not he will ever be freed to resume the ministry which he holds so dear, and yet these are the words that are on his lips. He is not concerned with whether or not he will have a meal that day. He is not concerned with whether or not he will be released from his bonds. Yes, there is the desire to be freed in order that he may be of further use in the advancement of the Gospel throughout the region, but his chief desire, his chief concern is that Christ be magnified. Is this your chief desire, dear friends? If you were thrown into a dark cramped prison cell with barely enough food to be able to survive, would the cares and pleasures of this world be what is on your mind or would it be the glory of your Savior? If it is not your chief desire here and now, in a time and place in which you have been afforded every freedom to spread the

Gospel of Jesus Christ and magnify His name in all places, what makes you think that it will be when the going gets tough, when you face true adversity and even real persecution? If it is your chief desire here and now, as I trust that it is, are you so reliant upon the Spirit of the Lord, are you so content in your union with Christ that His name being magnified will be your chief concern if you find yourself in bonds for the sake of the Gospel? We often declare, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain,” but we rarely contemplate what that actually means. We rarely meditate on what it means that Christ would be magnified. The exhortation to you this morning is magnify Christ whether by life or by death. We will consider this exhortation by looking at three statements made by the Apostle in our passage: first, to live is Christ; next, to die is gain; and lastly, abide and continue.

First, let us consider how we are to magnify Christ by looking at the Apostle’s statement ‘to live is Christ.’ Paul understood that if he lived, he lived to know more of Christ studying His person and learning by his happy experience so that he increased in his knowledge of his Lord and Savior. When Paul says “to live is Christ” he is speaking of his desire to know Christ more, to imitate Christ more, to preach Christ more, and to enjoy Christ more. “To live is Christ” means that there is an earnest desire to have more and more intimacy in your union with Christ. Brothers and sisters, this must be your desire as well. You must have what the puritans of old referred to as an experimental religion, an experimental faith. Your faith in Christ Jesus must be something which tests your heart, which performs an experiment within your soul, something which is experienced in a true way. This is something which only the Spirit can bring about with the believer. Paul understood this. Look at verses 19 and 20, “For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, 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.” It is by the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ that this can be brought about.

But not only that, the Spirit of Christ utilizes the instrument of the prayer of the saints in order to bring this about as well. Calvin says that “the supply of the Spirit is the efficient cause, while prayer is a subordinate help.” Friends, are you praying that the Spirit would bring about a greater experience of Christ in your own lives? Are you praying that He would bring about this greater experience of Christ in the lives of your brothers and sisters as well? Jehovah has seen fit to use the prayers of the saints as a means of strengthening that vital relation that believers have with their risen Savior. Utilize that means. Take part in the corporate prayer meeting that we have every Wednesday evening and use that as an opportunity to pray that the faith that we confess would be made more and more real each and every day. Go into your private prayer closet and cry out to the Lord to cause you to experience Christ in a greater way. Then go and live out that faith that you confess. Go and live out the religion which you claim as your own. This is how Christ is magnified in your life, not by mere idleness in the things of the Lord, but in an active obedience to His precepts as found in the Scriptures.

Live in obedience to the Law of God. If you are in Christ then you have been sanctified, set apart for a holy purpose. That holiness ought to be made evident in your lives. When a child of God is enabled to act up to his profession, he shows to all around him the beauty of holiness: he commends to them the law which he obeys: he constrains them to see and acknowledge its transcendent excellence: and in advancing thus the honor of the law, he honors also the Lawgiver. This is what we mean by magnifying Christ. Think of a magnifying glass for a moment. That magnifying glass serves the purpose of making something which is small appear bigger than it truly is. Friends, if this is what you think magnifying Christ means then you have an errant notion of that phrase. To magnify Christ isn't to make Him appear bigger than He actually is, but instead to

show to the world how big He truly is. All of your labors, all of your actions ought to be with the express purpose of proclaiming to this world which lost and dead in sin how great the Savior is. Display to the world that change which the Spirit has wrought in you. Simeon writes, “Who then that witnesses this change, and beholds the believer’s victories over sin and Satan, and his progressive advancement in the ways of holiness, must not adore that power by which so great a miracle is wrought? In this Christ is indeed magnified: “the exceeding greatness of his power is made known;” and the sufficiency of his grace is incontrovertibly established.”

We should “yield all our members instruments of righteousness unto God.” We should consider our eyes, our ears, and all our powers, as consecrated to him, and to be used for him. Those who truly desire that Christ may be magnified desire that he may be magnified in their body. They present their bodies a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1), and yield their members as instruments of righteousness unto God, Rom. 6:13. They are willing to serve his designs, and be instrumental to his glory, with every member of their body, as well as faculty of their soul. The glory of Christ ought to be the end of our life, the grace of Christ the principle of our life, and the word of Christ the rule of it. The Christian life is derived from Christ, and directed to him. He is the principle, rule, and end of it. In understanding this, you too can say with the Apostle, “For me to live is Christ.

Let us now move to consider how we are to magnify Christ by looking at the Apostle’s statement ‘to die is gain.’ This is a foreign concept for most people in this world. Self-preservation is touted by many as the ultimate good, that thing which we must all strive for. And yes, self-preservation is a good thing. In fact it is one of the duties required in the sixth commandment. But we must not misconstrue Paul’s words as though he saying he has a death wish. This is not the suicidal thoughts of a man stuck in prison, but the righteous thoughts of a man desiring to be with his Lord. Charles Spurgeon says Paul writes this “because death, he felt would free

him from all sin and from all doubts as to his state in the present and the future. It would be gain to him, for then he would be delivered from all suffering. And he would find, above all, his Savior, and be a partaker of his glory.” We, as believers, do not view death as the world does. To the world death is the loss of everything, the loss of all pleasures and worldly gains, the loss of all treasures and earthly relationships. But for those who are in Christ it is gain, for it is the end of all his weakness and misery and the perfection of his comforts and accomplishment of his hopes; it delivers him from all the evils of life, and brings him to the possession of the chief good. Matthew Henry writes, “Those who know the value of Christ and heaven will readily acknowledge it far better to be in heaven than to be in this world, to be with Christ than to be with any creature; for in this world we are compassed about with sin, born to trouble, born again to it; but, if we come to be with Christ, farewell sin and temptation, farewell sorrow and death, for ever.”

I ask you, dear saints, is this your view of death? Do you tremble at the thought of leaving this world because of the things that will be left behind? Do you fear no longer having the possessions you enjoy, the relationships you cherish, the experiences you hold so dear? If that is the case then I call on you to repent of your sin of idolatry, to repent of holding the things of the world in an elevated position above the excellencies of Christ and the joy that will be experienced in the presence of the Lord for all eternity. If the thought of leaving this world and entering into that blessed state in glory does not excite you, does not bring about a godly longing to be there, then you ought to question whether or not you will even enter into that blessed state. Friends, the thought of being with your Savior for all eternity must captivate you. It must seize your soul and motivate your actions. Understanding the blessed reality which is to come, truly realizing that to die is gain, will motivate you to bring the Gospel to those around you in order that they may experience it as well. And understanding this great truth, understanding that to die is gain, will be an encouragement to you in every trial of life. Nothing will be able to discourage you, nothing

will be able to cause you to doubt, nothing will be able to cause you to deny the faith. Even if death is knocking at your door, you will be able to welcome it as an old friend.

I am reminded of the last words of the Covenanter martyr Hugh MacKail. He was to be hanged in Edinburgh for his commitment to the Reformed faith. After singing Psalm 31 he began to climb the scaffold. “I care no more to go up this ladder, and over it, than if I were going home to my father’s house.” At each step of the ladder he cried out “Every step is a degree nearer heaven.” After he read from God’s Word and addressed the crowds, the noose was placed around his neck. “Now I leave off to speak any more to creatures, and turn my speech to thee, O Lord. Now I begin my intercourse with God which shall never be broken off. Farewell father and mother, friends and relations! Farewell, the world and all delights! Farewell, meat and drink! Farewell, sun, moon, and stars! Welcome, God and Father! Welcome, sweet Lord Jesus, Mediator of the New Covenant! Welcome, blessed Spirit of grace, God of all consolation! Welcome, glory! Welcome, eternal life! Welcome, death!” and with those last words the rope tightened around his neck, and this young gospel preacher passed into the presence of his Savior. Welcome death! To die is gain! That is the Christian view of things. Departing and being with Christ is far better. Brothers and sisters, to die is gain.

So how are we to understand the two statements together? Paul says that these two things must both be understood, but he also recognizes the dilemma it causes for the believer. You may be thinking to yourself that we should all desire to simply depart this world and go on to be in the presence of the Lord. Paul wants to be with Christ but also to remain on earth for the sake of the church. This is his dilemma. However, the outcome is in God’s hands, and Paul is confident that God has further work for him to do among the Philippians. We see this in verses 23 and 24, “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.” Let us consider the solution to this dilemma by considering how we are to magnify Christ by looking at the Apostle’s determination to continue and abide. Paul had his theology right. He knew that if the Lord chose to not deliver him from his bondage but instead to bring about his death that it would mean freedom from the effects of sin and perfect blessedness in the presence of his Savior. He also knew that as long as the Lord chose to keep him on this earth he had a covenantal obligation to magnify Christ in all that he does. So knowing these two truths and seeing the need for further work among the churches, especially in Philippi, Paul says that it is better for him to stay. We read in verses 25 and 26, “And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith; That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again.”

The purpose of continuing and abiding is so that the Gospel will advance and that souls will be saved. I’ve heard the question asked before, ‘Why doesn’t God just take Christians to heaven as soon as they are saved?’ While there is a righteous sentiment behind that question in a desire to be freed from this world of sin and be in glory, there is a fatal flaw in it as well. The Lord has determined the means by which the Gospel will be advanced in this world and souls will be saved from everlasting darkness. That means is by the proclamation of the Gospel by those who have been transformed by it. We confess in Larger Catechism 155 that the preaching of the Word is the primary means of grace, “How is the Word made effectual to salvation? The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word, an effectual means of enlightening, convincing, and humbling sinners; of driving them out of themselves, and drawing them unto Christ; of conforming them to his image, and subduing them to his will; of strengthening them against temptations and corruptions; of building them up in grace, and establishing their hearts in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation.” Without believers on this earth to proclaim the Gospel to those who are lost there would never be any more who

come to salvation. Consider Paul's words in Romans 10, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?"

Saints, you have a great purpose in being here. You have a great need to continue and abide. Until the day when the Lord take you home or the skies are rent and Christ Jesus consummates the age to come, you have a duty to continue and abide so the work of the Church can continue and the Gospel advance. Your purpose in this life is not to live your best life now. It is not to see how many possessions you can amass in your lifetime. It is not to see how successful you can be in your career. It is not to see how strong of relationships you can develop. Christ says in Matthew 6:19-21, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Devote yourselves to the work of the Church. Get involved in whatever way you can in the efforts to see the Gospel advance in this place. Until the Gospel has covered the earth as the waters cover the seas, until Christ returns in all His glory, until this earth passes away and we are ushered in to the New Jerusalem, there will always be work to do. There will always be the need to continue and abide. Next month we are scheduling an outreach event in which we will invite those in our community to enjoy games and food, but most importantly, to hear the Gospel proclaimed. Make the things of the Church a priority to you. The Gospel going forth is more important than watching a sports game or going on a trip or taking part in some activity. Devote yourselves to the cause of Christ. Take up our blue banner as your own to see this world won for Christ's crown and covenant. Friends, you must continue and abide.

Brothers and sisters, nothing in this world is more important than magnifying Christ. To exalt Christ, to make known His salvation, and to the extend the boundaries of His kingdom, must be your constant aim, your sole enjoyment. Proclaim with the Apostle, “For me to live is Christ.” Let your actions be a living testimony to the finished work of Christ. Let your lives reflect the salvation which He purchased with His own blood. Let everything you do proclaim to the world that Jesus Christ came to save sinners. And do not fear whatever may come your way. Do not fear the ridicule that you may experience. Do not fear the persecution that seems imminent. Do not fear even death, for to die is gain. “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” Magnify Christ whether by life or by death.