

To Die Is Gain

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We come this morning to a wonderful text and to a topic upon which I love to preach. I feel very at home in this realm of thought that we are approaching this morning from the book of Philippians 1:21. I invite you to turn there as we have returned to our verse by verse exposition. Our main text for today says this,

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

One of the things that I think about often is the inability or the refusal or the reluctance of people to consider the topic of death. People occasionally get uncomfortable when I talk about the way that I visit cemeteries and things like that and people wonder why you would be preoccupied with those kinds of things. I look at it this way, death is inevitable, death is the one thing that we will share in common, I guess, in addition to paying taxes as the phrase goes. We are all destined for the grave if our Lord tarries, and to me it only makes sense, especially as Christian people, to contemplate that and to work our way through that so that it no longer holds any fear for us. And last time as we were looking at this verse, chapter 1, verse 21, "For me to live is Christ," we saw the positive dimension of a Christian's philosophy of life. Paul is teaching here that Christ for the Christian is the supreme thing in life. He is the one for whom we live. He is the one by whom we live. Christ controls us. His love gives us a sense of security. His love gives us a sense of belonging, and his life and his death and his resurrection have secured our deliverance from sin, our forgiveness, and he has secured and purchased for us the certainty of eternal life. That's a wonderful position for a Christian to be in, and what we saw last time was that as you understand these things, it works itself out in the way that we think about our righteousness before God, we have no righteousness of our own, we are wholly dependent upon the righteousness of Christ for our standing before God; it works out in our relationships with men, just as Christ humbled himself for our sake, we humble ourselves for the sake of those around us; and it works out in our response to circumstances. Paul says in chapter 4, "I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I find because I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."

So to be in Christ, beloved, for you as a Christian to be in Christ is to have a comprehensive sense of where you find your life vitality. It is all bound up in Christ and that relationship with Christ, that position in Christ, more technically theologically speaking, that union with Christ defines every vertical and horizontal aspect in life as you

go through the life that the Lord has given you. But in light of what we were saying earlier about death, we realize that this life eventually comes to an end. If the Lord delays his return, you and I will pass through the valley, we will enter the valley of death and we will depart from this earthly life, and for some, that makes them uncomfortable and what I want to do is I kind of have a twofold goal for you here this morning, one is that I want to ease whatever that sense of discomfort you may have with death, that fear of death, we want to confront that and deal with it, and also just give you a sense of the peace and confidence that lies as you approach it, not just to calm your fears now but that when the day of your departure comes, that you could face it with a sense of peace and confidence and serenity because on the front end, on times like these you have considered what Scripture has to say about death, what it has to say about life in this world, and to be able to approach it with a serenity and a Christian maturity that is worthy of the Lord died for you. That's what we want. This is something far more than just finding our way through another day or through another week, this is about having a biblical understanding of life and death that allows you with Paul to live above it and to not be stressed out, as it were, by the challenges of what is coming.

And what makes this so poignant in the life and in the meaning of what Paul wrote here, is that when Paul wrote this in Philippians 1, he was facing the possibility of execution. He did not know how much longer he had to live. He was under the imprisonment of Roman authorities and it was possible that he would face capital punishment shortly after he wrote this. Now as it turned out he lived a few years later but he didn't know that at the time as he makes clear in the context of the letter, but when Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians, he was facing possible execution. For all he knew, he had a terminal disease called Roman punishment, you might say. Life was on the edge and his next day was not certain for him, and yet what you find is, and this is where the challenge comes for us today, is as you read through this epistle what you find is that even the prospect of death did not shake his joy. Paul was not dissuaded from his joyful attitude toward life by the fact that he might die soon. What that should say to you is that joy in the Christian life is not found by avoiding the topic of death or denying its existence or sticking your fingers in the ear when somebody starts to talk about it, or just uncomfortably shuffling through a memorial or a funeral service just as quickly as you can so that you can get out and not have to contemplate it. That's not the way that we are to think, beloved, at all. In Ecclesiastes it says it's better to go to a house of mourning than to a house of feasting because the living take it to heart. You're supposed to contemplate this and understand it in a biblical way, and when you do, suddenly you're living in a more fearless way. There's not the threat of death, it does not hold the same kind of fear for you that it once did.

And here's the question that I want answered when this is introduced, then, is how can we make that true for ourselves? Paul said, look at Philippians 1:21, look at it there again with me, Paul says in Philippians 1:21, he says, "to die is gain." To die is gain. Now look, we are used to thinking about death from the completely opposite perspective. Somebody has fought cancer for a long period of time and their life comes to an end, what's so often said is that they lost the battle with cancer, right? They lost. Cancer won and they lost, and that perspective is the fact that I lost what I had. Or perhaps more closer to home for

some of you as you think about the prospect of death whether you're in your seventies and eighties and it's a little closer, or your twenties, thirties or forties and it seems further away, we all think about death and we tend to think about it from the prospect of what we're going to leave behind. I'm going to leave a beloved spouse behind. I'm going to leave my children behind, my loved ones behind, and we don't like that prospect of separation and it concerns us, and what's going to happen to them when I'm gone, and just that prospect and it's all earthly focused, and there's a certain understandable reality to that but I want to help you think through it today in a way that can take you beyond that as you absorb these things in your mind and reflect on them over time.

So how can we make this true for ourselves, that you and I could say to die is gain? I am not afraid of the grave. I am not afraid of the flapping wings of the angel of death. How can that be true for us when the reality of death is one that we cannot avoid? Two things for you here this morning that I want to share with you from Scripture and that are suggested by this passage. First of all is this, is that as a Christian you must remember the passing nature of this life. Remember the passing nature of this life. You have to start with what reality is. What is reality? The reality is that the present life and present relationships that you enjoy are not permanent and they are not going to go on forever. That's so hard to hear, isn't it? We don't like to have our bubble of security shattered like that but it's true and Scripture tells us to contemplate that in many places.

Now I'm not arguing that we shouldn't enjoy life. Most of us do enjoy life and you should. God has blessed us in so many different ways. Most of us enjoy a measure of material prosperity that we're able to enjoy to one degree or another, certainly compared to other parts of the world. Many of us have families that we enjoy and love and share in things together, or we have friends, or we have a church body that we find particular joy in. There's just so many blessings like that and 10,000 beside, as the hymn writer said. So God has blessed us and it is good and it is right and it is proper for us to give thanks to him for what he has given and to enjoy these things as good gifts that have come down from good heavenly Father to us. Amen. Praise the Lord. That is just the reality of it.

But even as we are giving thanks in that way, my friends, you have to remember this, is that this world is not our home. This world is not our final destination. Paul said as much, turn over to chapter 3 with me in Philippians, chapter 3, verse 20 just for a moment here. There is this element of looking forward, looking to the future, looking beyond this life that is intrinsic to being a Christian. Paul said in Philippians 3:20, he said, "our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself." You see, beloved, fundamental to Christian thinking, fundamental to a Christian philosophy of life is this, is that God saved you for an eternal destination. God had eternal purposes for which he saved you. He did not save you simply to bless you and make you comfortable in this life. That's not always the case and in any rate, this life is temporary. So understand, make it fundamental to your perspective on being a Christian that God saved you for eternal purposes to bring you to an eternal home, as Jesus said in John 14, "I go away to prepare a place for you, and if I go away, I will come again so that where I

am you may be there also." Fundamental in the reality of being a Christian is that this world is not our home.

That's why, beloved, that's why, my friends, that Scripture says things like this, Matthew 6:19, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth." 1 John 2:17, "This world is passing away." In James 4:14 it says, "You don't know what your life will be like tomorrow." So what we find as we look at those Scriptures and contemplate the eternal destination of our lives with what Scripture says about the undeniable reality of living in this world, this world is passing. Your life has a passing nature, a transient nature to it, so much so that David in the Psalms prays to God, I believe it's in Psalm 39, he says, "Lord, help me to know how transient I am, that my life is but a vapor here." And part of the reason that we need the Lord to give us that illumination in our minds and our hearts is so that we would have a proper perspective on the life that we're living now because, beloved, what that means is that if the Lord tarries, if the Lord doesn't come back soon, you and I are going to depart this life through the one exit door of death. That's the reality of it.

Now just to repeat myself and to sympathize with you as you hear what I am saying here today, I understand that there is a natural initial reaction against that. To some degree we like life, we love those who are close to us, and as a result for some of you, maybe many of you, death creates an uncomfortable fear in you. You want the topic to go away. You want this message to be over. And you know, the fear of the unknown, what's that going to be like, perhaps a lingering sense of guilt that you have before God that gives you a sense of shrinking back from passing into this life and entering into his presence, it creates a lot of discomfort that makes many people simply want to avoid the subject and you may be more sympathetic with that than with what I'm about to say but, beloved, I just want to tell you that, and I say this sympathetically, I say it pastorally, I say it with a great concern for your soul and your well-being, your spiritual well-being, I want to tell you that that mindset is utterly foolish. It's foolish to live life that way. It's foolish to think that way. How foolish is it to avoid the ultimate destination of what life will be? Hebrews 9:27 says, "It is appointed for man to die once and after this comes judgment." So I look at that, I look at this reality that we're talking about here, and I look at it this way: people are refusing to consider that which is absolutely sure to occur. Why would you do that? Why would you live life that way? Why not instead face the fear, see what Scripture has to say about it, and come to a place where you say, "I understand the reality of death. I understand how to triumph over death and now that fear has been taken away from me."

I may come back to this passage but turn over to Hebrews 2. Part of the purpose of Christ in coming and part of the purpose in Christ in saving you is to deliver you from that slavish fear of death. In Hebrews 2:14 it says, "Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil," and look at it here in verse 15, "and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives." Christ saved us in part to deliver us from that fear of death. This is an important part of spiritual maturity, of spiritual growth, that to the extent that you are afraid of dying, that you would contemplate Scripture and overcome that fear.

What we find as we read the book of Philippians, then, and in that context, go back to Philippians 1 to our text, in Philippians 1 Paul says, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." There's a sense in which, I mean this in a positive way, it may not come out quite that way because of the way that I'm going to say it, but there is a sense in which that text is a taunt against the fears of the ungodly and their rejection of Christ. They live life, they think they have freedom in the bondage of their sin, but the reality of it is they cannot face death, they are afraid of death, they redefine it, they make up their own ideas about it. At the core of their heart there is this fear and uncertainty about what's going to happen to them when they die. Maybe some of you have that same fear in you, "I don't know what's going to happen to me when I die." To the extent that that's the predominant thought in your mind, that's an indication that you may not truly be born again, that you may not fully understand the work of Christ or have received him personally that he might deliver you from all of those things. Paul's words, "to die is gain," says to the world, "I have something that you don't have." Christians have a confidence in facing the ultimate reality that is a stranger to the world. So here in Philippians you find the Apostle Paul soaring above all of life, all of death, and what Paul's example and what Paul's teaching does is helps you move beyond the fear of death in your own life because the Bible says to die is gain, and if it's a gain, then it's something that does not need to be feared.

So how do you overcome the fear of death as a Christian? Well, first of all, you remember the passing nature of this life and that teaches you, that reminds you, you come back again and again to the fact that you are not supposed to set your hope in anything that might come to you in this life because it can be gone in a moment. It's passing. It's fleeting. It's uncertain. So your ultimate hope is not in this, your treasure is not here on earth and you remember that and you've seen through life, as it were, through the testimony of Scripture in a way that lets you see this life is passing and however good I have it during this life, however long I have it, it's still passing. It's still transient. It is still temporary. And we come to grips with that and that, you might say, is the negative side of understanding how to die is gain.

Let me give you point 2, that which is the positive side of it which is the glorious side of it, the joyful side of it, is to remember the outcome of salvation. Remember the outcome of salvation. And what we're talking about here, beloved, my friends in Christ, I'm doing more than imparting information here this morning, aren't I? This is not simply an impartation of information so that you can have more facts in your head about different things. All what we're saying is based on truth and you need to know the truths of what we're saying, but what we're talking about here is that upon which you meditate, you think this over, you consider life in light of these things and you meditate on them over time so that they become settled convictions in your heart. So this is not simply giving you facts but giving you that for your mind to meditate on to find the settled peace that would give you the same confidence that the Apostle Paul had. Look, the Apostle Paul's confidence, "to live is Christ and to die is gain," his confidence was not unique to him. This was not the exclusive prerogative because he was an apostle or a so-called super saint. This is the reality for every true Christian. It is the nature of Christianity itself. To

live is Christ, that's true, and to die is gain, for the Christian that is true for every one of us and therefore the joyful confidence, the lack of fear in the contemplation of death is meant to be the reality which governs our mind and outlook on life as well.

So you have to remember the outcome of salvation and, oh, is this sweet in my opinion anyway. You read what Paul says here, "to live is Christ and to die is gain," and you remember the circumstances under which he's living at the time, Caesar's sword is hanging just above his neck, so to speak, and you find that Paul's not afraid. He's not afraid of death. This letter to the Philippians is saturated with joy and he goes back to the theme of joy again and again and again, so much so that he says death will be gain to him. That word "gain," it's something that's advantageous. It's going to be, Paul says, it's going to be to my personal advantage when I die. Wow. Wow. Is that ever an otherworldly perspective on this life and the next. Death holds no fear for Paul. He says actually death is going to turn out so that it's something better for me than what I have right now.

And beloved, let me just stop here and make a little bit of a distinction of nuance here. Some people do look forward to death but it's simply because they're tired of the pain of this life and death they view as an escape from the pain of the present life. They get out of bad circumstances. They get out of bad health or whatever. They embrace the idea of death because it's an escape from their present troubles to them. And supposedly, I guess, that's what people who are moved to suicide think that death is their way out of their problems. That's a whole another issue that I'm not going to go on to that tangent for now, but that is not Paul's perspective here. Paul is not talking about this in simply a negative sense that, "I can't wait to die because I'll be out of this prison, I'll be free from these chains, I'll be free from my ministerial obligations." No, he's got a positive view of it.

It's actually going to be better and how is it going to be better for him? Look at verse 23. He makes it very plain, he says, "But I have," look at this, "I have the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better." He says, "For me to die is gain." Why is it gain, Paul? Why is it to your advantage? Why will it be better for you? He says, "Because when I die, I am going to be in the presence of Christ. I am going to be in the conscious immediate presence of the One who loved my soul and gave His life for me. I am going to be in the conscious immediate presence of the One for whom I've lived. Now I will die for Him and then I'll live forevermore with Him and I'll be with Him. I will be with the One who loved me and gave Himself for me." And beloved, that is the perspective that you need to understand as a Christian. This is what you need to grasp and to make the immediate association of death with, to stop thinking about death so much as a departure from this life, although it is that, a departure from what you've known and a departure from your loved ones, it is all of that and that's why we shrink back from the thought of it, but to let our thinking of death be transformed by what the truth is, that while it is a departure from what we have known in this life, beloved, it's not simply a departure from, it is a departure to, it is a departure to Christ, it is a departure to the sovereign Son of God it is a departure to the destination for which he saved you. It is the fulfillment of what Christ appointed for you, what God the Father appointed for you before the foundation of the world. It's the fulfillment of the very reasons that God saved you is so that you would

be in the presence of Christ forever, and to understand that that happens immediately upon your final breath here on earth.

As I like to say, you exhale your final breath on earth, and the next inhalation you make, so to speak, is in heaven and there is no time warp, there is no period of soul sleep in between, contrary to what others might say. You depart into the immediate conscious presence of Christ and Scripture is filled with this, especially in the New Testament. What did Jesus say to the thief on the cross when the thief on the cross said, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom"? He had been reading the placard above Jesus, the crime for Jesus was that he was the King of the Jews, and that thief on the cross after a period of rebellion had his heart changed and as he read that he was looking at the King of the Jews, he said, "Remember me when You come into Your kingdom." And what did Jesus say to him? What was the promise to him as they both were hanging on that vile Roman cross on their separate crosses? What did Jesus say to him? He said, "Verily I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise." That's the way that it works, beloved, and that gives us insight into the measure of the unconquerable and the majestic grace of God on unworthy sinners like us, that one day we breathe our last and from a position of weakness in the flesh we wake up in glory with Christ and we are with him in paradise.

So what we understand based on Scripture is that death is not the end of our existence, and contrary to what Catholics teach, death does not usher us into a place of punishment called purgatory. No, no, no, no, no, no. There are no sins left to be paid. There is no further punishment to be done because Jesus paid it all when he sacrificed his life on the cross, and he has shared and given us a gift of his perfect righteousness that gives us a status where we are prepared, we are entitled to heaven immediately not because of your merit or mine but because of the merit of Christ that has been given to us as a gift, so that we have everything that is necessary to entitle us to the presence of a holy God on the drawing of our last breath here on earth. That's how great his grace is to us and so death ushers us into the conscious reality of Christ's presence.

Look at another passage that teaches the same thing, 2 Corinthians 5:8. Actually we'll start at verse 6, 2 Corinthians 5:6 to see the full contrast. It's the same kind of contrast that Paul's talking about in Philippians 1:21. He says, "Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body," in other words, during this physical life, "we are absent from the Lord-- for we walk by faith, not by sight," we don't see Christ as we're here on this earth, he says in verse 8, "we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord." Paul says, "My preference is what comes after I die." In Philippians he says, "That's going to be to my advantage," here in 2 Corinthians he says, "I prefer, given the choice, I would prefer to be absent from this body so that I can be with Christ in heaven."

So beloved, the only way that Paul can say that it's going to be a gain for him to die, the only way he can say it's to his advantage is that if it's better on the other side. It's better for the Christian on the other side than it is here and what we have to do is we have to let go, we have to release a little bit our grip on this life, to not cling so much to what we

know and see with our physical senses, and transfer our trust, our hope and our confidence to what Scripture says the reality is. You are going to depart and be with Christ and that's very much better. To be absent from this body is to be at home with the Lord, to be where you really belong, to be where your citizenship is, to be where your ultimate place of rest and belonging are. That's on the other side, it's not here. You are created with an eternal soul that is not entirely comfortable living in a realm that's passing and temporary. You were created for eternal purposes. You were saved for eternal purposes and what death does is it ushers you into the fulfillment of those and ushers you into the presence of the one who loved your soul and gave himself up for it. In the language of 1 John 3:2, I've often said it's my favorite verse in the Bible, "We will be like Him because we will see Him just as He is."

Now look, I consider it a great privilege to be able to preach to you fine people week after week after week and those of you that are visiting, it's a privilege to be able to preach to you today, I hope you can be back with us again another time. I love that. You people are precious to me. I like to look out at your faces and to preach to you. Much of my time during the week I'm thinking about your faces as I'm preparing what I'm going to preach the next time. I love that. I love you with the love of Christ. It's a wonderful thing to be able to do what we do together. But do you know what? Given the choice, if the choice was placed to me, say you have to choose right now, do you want to see the faces of these people or would you want to see the face of Christ? To see the face of Christ, far better. Far better because I know those of you that know Christ, you'll join later, you'll see his face too. To see the face of Christ is the ultimate goal of the believing heart is to be able to see him face-to-face and render personal in presence of thanksgiving for what he's done for us in his life, death and resurrection. You just want to kind of jump into that realm, doesn't it? I'm going to be like Christ. Not in his deity but somehow made perfect. I'm going to see him face-to-face. I'm going to see the wounds by which my redemption was purchased, and so are you if you're in Christ. These are heavenly, transcendent, eternal glories that far surpass anything on this earth, even the most precious relationships that you have. The most perfect earthly relationships that you have now are nothing compared to what that will be like. You see, because ultimately you belong to the one who bought you, not to the people here on earth. And that doesn't mean we love each other less because we love Christ more. It doesn't mean that we don't enjoy our time here because we'll enjoy that more. It just means that we have a clarity in our minds about what our ultimate priority and what our ultimate affections are so that when death comes and separates us from what we have always known, by faith we recognize and anticipate the greater, the better, the advantageous reality that is just ahead when we enter into his presence. This is at the heart of being a Christian, beloved, is that we prefer Christ to everything else and death simply makes that a present reality to us.

Scripture goes on and says that later in the furtherance of Christ's purposes at the end times, we'll receive a resurrected body and we'll be glorified in that but, beloved, here's the thing, here's the clincher for you, as I'm speaking to Christians here this morning, as a Christian you are united with Christ, right? You are in Christ it says again and again and again and again in the New Testament. You've been united to him so that what is his belongs to you. We are fellow heirs with Christ, it says in Romans 8. Well, what that

means is – oh, follow this, beloved. This is so simple that a child can understand it and yet it's foreign to the best minds of the unbelieving world. What it means is this. Christ died, right? Christ is resurrected, right? What has happened to Christ is what's going to happen to you. Death did not conquer Christ. He was raised from the dead. You have died with Christ, your life is hidden with him in God, and the resurrection that is his, the life that is beyond the grave that is his belongs to you because that is what he saved you for. He has shared it with you. He has given you everything that he has including life beyond the grave so that 2 Corinthians 4:14 says, "He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus." If God raised his Son from the dead, he's going to do the same thing for everyone who is in his Son. This is clear, basic Bible truth and it's what delivers us from the fear of death in this life.

My Christian friend, you are united with Christ in his resurrection. Let's just make this really really simple. Christ has conquered death. You are in Christ. You are united to him and that means that you will conquer death also. Now take that to the next step in terms of the way that you think about life and the end of life, then, and say, "Well, if Christ has conquered death and I'm in Christ and He's in glory and I'm a going to be with Him, then death holds no fear for me. Death has lost its sting to me. I can walk through this life without fear of what happens to me if a car runs an intersection and hits me, I can go through life without fear of what the doctor is going to say to me at my next health report because I understand that this life was temporary to begin with and even if the worst thing earthly speaking happens, that introduces me into the presence of Christ. This is to my advantage. I can't lose here because Christ won't lose me in His love for me." So when you know Christ and when you know biblical doctrine, death loses its fear. Christ will receive you into his presence.

Look, think about it this way. You know, so much of this just comes down to believing that the Bible is true, reading it and studying it enough to be acquainted with what it says, and trusting it, and recognizing that the God who saved you is a good God. He said, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age," in Matthew 28. In Psalm 23, I text this verse to a lot of you in times of difficulty, "I fear no evil for You are with me. Yea, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil for You are with me. You are with me. You are with me." Christ is with you now. He will be with you at the moment of death. You will be with him in glory on the next moment that comes. And what is there to be afraid of? All of a sudden there is an unconquerable confidence and courage that lets us face death in a manner that is totally different than what the world does.

And if Christ has blessed you in this life, beloved, and I trust that most of you would say, "Oh, He has. Oh, He saved me. He saved me by grace. I'm saved by grace through faith and that not of myself. It was a gift of God." Well beloved, if he saved you in this earthly life, if he did the lesser thing, don't you think he'll do the greater thing as well? He hasn't changed. He's not going to change. If he's blessed you now, he's not going to stop at the moment of death. He intends to bless you forever and we're just humbled and we look, as it were, at Christ and say, "You have been so good to me. I don't deserve any of this, but in light of what You have done at the cross, in light of what You have revealed in Your

word, in light of Your work in my life, I completely trust You to continue to bless me no matter what comes in the future, and that You will not stop blessing me, You will not abandon me in my hour of greatest need, You will not abandon me as I'm drawing my final breath. You will be right there and, as it were, the angels will whisk me into glory." That's the way to live and, beloved, I want to tell you, that's the way to die too.

In the lobby out in the larger outer lobby, we have copies of a message that I preached a couple of years ago titled "Your Final Act of Worship," and in that message it discusses the many wonderful things that occur when a believer enters into the presence of the Lord. I'm not going to rehearse all of that here, I'd just encourage you to find that message either in the CD or online and listen to it because it rounds out what we're talking about here today.

But beloved, here's the thing, this becomes so practical at your most critical hour of life. Your most critical hour of life is not your next job interview or your next performance or what happens to you in marriage or any of those things. None of that compares in importance to what happens to you in the final hour of your life. That's the most important thing and if you are approaching that final hour with some sense of conscious awareness, knowing these things and having entrusted yourself to them completely transforms them. One pastor described it like this from the opposite perspective. He said a Christian is about to die and he's much afraid and a servant of God stands at his bedside with an open Bible. You can picture the scene, right? A person laid out, struggling, knowing death is just around the corner for them, and perhaps a little bit weak in faith at the moment. I've seen it. And he said the pastor reads to him from Revelation 1, "Do not be afraid," Jesus speaking, "I am the first and the last and the living One. I was dead and behold I am alive forevermore and I have the keys of death and of Hades." And a smile of heavenly peace crosses the dying face as he whispers to his pastor, "O death, where is thy sting?" Another moment and another sinner saved by grace enters that city which has no night. God himself wipes away all tears from his eyes. There in that place beyond the grave, no one complains of being sick, sorrow and sighing are gone, and the streets of gold are not darkened by funeral processions because there death is no more.

Beloved, I ask you, do you believe that? Do you believe that? Then you can hold life with an open hand. There is no fear in death for you because that is the reality that awaits you. Not because I say so but because this is what God's word teaches to his people. His word is trustworthy. The seal of truth is upon it by the resurrection of Jesus Christ and in all of these things we find that upon which we can base our hope so that, beloved, these are glorious truths, so that for those of you that are in Christ, when death approaches you, when the doctor says it's terminal and you have three months or three days, when family is gathered around at the final time around you, when death approaches you like that, you can say, "Life has been good but it was never my final goal. I can leave now. My gain is just ahead." That belongs to every true believer in Jesus Christ. Death cannot harm us. It is more than the end of our earthly troubles, beloved, it brings you into that destination for which your heavenly Father chose you before the foundation of the world, and that's why every true Christian can say, "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."

Friends, have you overcome the fear of death? My unsaved friend, does the reality of the contemplation of death strike your heart with tremendous fear? I want you to know that Christ is the answer to that fear. He invites you to come to him that you might be saved, that this gift of forgiveness of sin and eternal life might be yours by receiving him in faith. It's a gift. You don't have to earn it. You don't have to go out and go through a bunch of religious rituals. It's all found in Christ and he offers himself freely to you, to take to him all of your sins, all of your guilt, all of your fear of death and say, "Lord, save me from it all." The angels of which we've spoken clap their wings in applause, Scripture tells us. In that moment there is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous men who need no repentance. I say that all by way of invitation and encouragement to you, my unsaved friend, this is your opportunity to enter into the glorious realities of which we have spoken here today, and once you are in Christ not even death can separate you from his eternal love.

Let's bow together in prayer.

Our dear Lord, we pause for just a moment to allow You to work these things by Your Spirit deep into our hearts. Help our contemplations, help our meditations. Help each one to acknowledge from the depth of their heart this is a passing life, my hope can't be in what happens here ultimately, and then, Father, to realize the glorious reality that in our moment of greatest weakness, You display Your greatest strength. When we have lost control of the very act of living and life departs from us, You are there and we fear no evil for You are with us, and You usher us into a reality that is far beyond anything that we could ask or think. Eye has not seen, ear has not heard the glories that You have in store for Your people upon their entrance into the presence of Christ. God, seal that hope to every believing heart. Let us be a people who live well and, Father, even more who die well. And Father, for those who realize as we've spoken of these things that they are outside the reality of Your kingdom, Father, I pray that Your Spirit would come upon them, replace their heart of stone with a heart of flesh, to impart life to them that they might repent and believe in Christ and enter into this hope. O God, it's far too glorious to miss! How great the loss of those who miss this of which we've been speaking today, who instead of the presence of Christ enter into an eternal judgment instead. O God, not here, not for those under the sound of my voice. O God, we ask for a work of Your Spirit upon each heart, to open hearts, to open eyes, as you did with Lydia in Acts 16, open hearts, O God, that they might believe and be saved. We ask these things in the name of our Lord Jesus, the One who has risen from the dead and who is alive forevermore, who holds the keys of death and Hades all in His hand, all in His power, in the name of that One we pray, O God. Amen.

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