

# To Live Is Christ

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This morning, we are returning to our study of the book of Philippians and we come to a very critical and well-known text in Philippians 1:21. I invite you to turn to Philippians with me for our text this morning. We'll actually treat this over the course of two Sundays but the Apostle Paul in Philippians 1:21 writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit said this, he said,

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

Now beloved, I want you to as we start, I want you to picture something if you will, I want you to picture a man sitting on death row awaiting execution for crimes that he had committed and he knew that he had only the shortest of time to live before the executioner would come to do his duty. Shortly before that time, a pastor visits him and says that he has good news for the condemned. The prisoner has a momentary flash of hope that rises up in his heart and he says, "Good news, what is it?" And the pastor replies to him, "Be good and be kind to others." You see immediately, beloved, don't you, that there is no good news in a message like that to a condemned man. Indeed, that is a cruel message to communicate to one who is under the condemnation of death. You see, a message of morality brings no hope to anyone who is condemned whatsoever and yet is it not the message that is so typically proclaimed even in the name of Christ, boiling it down to its essence, telling condemned sinners who are awaiting their execution before God for their crimes against him, to tell them to be good, to love one another, to be kind to one another. Beloved, I trust that you see that there is no hope in a message like that. Our problem is not that we need to be instructed to be good, our problem is that we are not good for there is no one good, there is none righteous, not even one, and the sentence of condemnation has already been declared against us for the wrath of God has revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. So to go to condemned people with a message that essentially tells them to be good when they cannot be good enough on their own in order to find forgiveness of sin and the hope of eternal life beyond the grave, is not only a false message, it is a cruel message and it is one that gives people the sense that they can do something to earn favor with God when, in fact, that is not possible.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ has a different message and the Gospel, Gospel, the word "Gospel" means "good news," the Gospel of Jesus Christ truly is good news because it does not tell us what to do to be saved as though there were actions that we could take,

rather properly understood the Gospel of Jesus Christ tells us what God has done in order to save sinners. The Gospel of Jesus Christ tells us that God loved even sinful humanity to such an extent that he sent his Son into this world, that his blessed Son gave his life on the cross, gave his perfect life as a sacrifice for the sins of his people, gave that life on a cross in order to satisfy the wrath of God, in order to take the penalty of condemnation that you and I deserved, paid it in full, rose from the dead and now is Lord over all, is Lord over death, is Lord over life, and that he is a sufficient Savior for those who repent of sin and believe in him for forgiveness and eternal life. That is good news, the fact that sin has been dealt with by another, that sin has been dealt with by Christ, that sin has been satisfied, by which I mean that God has been satisfied with the work of Christ in a way that those who believe in him have all of their sins forgiven, have a righteousness given to them placed upon their account that God accepts. That is good news to say that the work of salvation is accomplished, believe in Christ and you can be saved. Receive him as he offers himself to you in the Gospel and you can be saved. That is good news.

You see, beloved, our hope with God is not what we do. If our hope in God is based on what we do and what we deserve, we are miserably lost. No. No, Christian friend, it is on the basis of a life that you did not live and on the basis of a death that you did not die that there is hope for your soul before a holy God. God counts everyone who believes in Christ as righteous in his sight. God said on multiple occasions in the earthly life of Jesus, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." The one who by faith receives Christ is united with Christ, God sees them in Christ and accepts them for the sake of his beloved Son. That's good news. That's good news. That is our hope and, beloved, that is our life. That is everything to those who are in Christ and that is what is offered to those of you today who do not yet believe in Christ, full complete forgiveness of sin from a loving gracious God offered to you if you will repent and come to Christ to be saved. Inherent in the message of the Gospel is that you're not good enough but that Christ is good enough, that Christ is enough, and so we believe in Christ to receive our share in him, as it were, and God accepts us on that basis.

For today's message and as we approach today's text, beloved, here's what I want you to see is that that great message of the Gospel, that great Christ who is the Gospel, for those who receive Christ, Christ henceforth and forevermore defines life in everything else. He gives the purpose. He is the reason. He is the source, the energy, the motivating factor in all of life, and we see this and we see the power of this in the context in which Paul wrote these words. Those of you that have been with us may remember, it's been quite a while and our memories fade on us, don't they, but Paul wrote this book of Philippians, he wrote this letter of Philippians from a Roman prison. He wrote to encourage those who had supported him with the knowledge of Christ and to give them a report on his own circumstances, and to thank them for a gift that they had sent by the hand of a man named Epaphroditus. So he's writing to them and as he's reporting on his circumstances, he tells them, in essence, I'm speaking colloquially now, he says, "I'm doing fine and the Gospel is doing fine even though I am in prison." He tells them, he says, "I am aware of the fact that there are mixed voices out there now that I am in prison preaching the Gospel." He says, "Some people are doing, are preaching the Gospel out of love and they are mindful of me and they love me in my imprisonment and they're preaching the Gospel boldly as a

result of that." He says, "There's others who have lesser motives. There are those who have impure motives, actually, they preach from envy and strife and they're trying to cause me distress, they're trying to make things difficult for me by doing things and trying to steal what they think is my reputation by preaching the Gospel while I am unable to do so here in prison." And Paul says, look at verses 19 and 20 with me, actually at the end of verse 18, he says, "I'll rejoice. I'm rejoicing and I will rejoice for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death." There is this Christ-centered perspective that he has. His hope, his confidence, his faith in Christ is sure. He is anchored in his soul in a way that gives him joy and he says, "Whether I live or whether I die, Christ is going to be exalted and that's why I can rejoice."

Now for those of us who are more carnally minded, that might sound very strange to our ears. How can you be in prison and rejoice? How can you not know what the outcome of your imprisonment might be? Paul, you might be executed soon. How can you have joy in the midst of that? It's the same question we all face, isn't it? How can you face life, the uncertainty of the future, the difficulties of what's happening now, the disappointments of the past, how do any of us have any sense of joy in the midst of a life like that here on an earth like this? Well, the answer that gave Paul joy is the same answer that gives us joy when we understand the centrality of Christ and the centrality of the Gospel to those who believe. Look at verse 21 with me again. Paul, how can you have this joy, how can you be so bold in prison with chains on your limbs? He answers it and he says in verse 21, he says, "For to me," it's emphatic, he said, "For me, I'll speak for myself here." For, giving the reason for this joy and boldness. Paul, how can you be like this? Verse 21 he says, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."

Now let's just step back for a moment from the text and just echo those words one more time. To live is Christ. Now without any other context, if that was the only verse that you saw, I'll be honest with you in terms of what my reaction to a phrase like that is, is what does that mean? What do you mean to live is Christ? What is that signifying? It's a condensed statement and it sounds really good to quote it and, you know, we can sound spiritual and, "Yeah, to me to live is Christ." What do you mean by that? Well, you know, it's not on its face in that taken alone in my opinion, it's not on its face evident exactly what that means and so commentators will say things like this and this is their explanation, this is what clarifies it for you after you read their expensive books, you'll read things like this, that Christ was the essence of his life. Okay, good. Christ was the reason for his actions or the goal of his life. Christ was the source of his strength. Now those are all good statements and they're true statements that Christ is the reason that he lives, the goal of his life, the source of his strength, but beloved, I really think that if we just leave it at that, you know, we could speak in platitudes, we could feel good about ourselves having said things and expanding on words like that and just go with it, and the reality is that you don't walk out unchanged. And I'm speaking pretty boldly here when I say things like that, I know, but I'm still left with what does that mean, and here's my question, how does that translate into my life and how does it affect the way that I think

and the way that I do and the way that I feel about the different things that are going on in life? It's all great to say Christ was the essence of his life, maybe you all know what that means and how it's supposed to apply in your heart but I don't know if that's all that we say. I don't know how I'm supposed to take that and have that somehow translate into joy and boldness for the way that it did the Apostle Paul. You know, I want Christ to be the essence of my life, I want him to be the goal of life, the source of my strength, but what does that mean that to live is Christ? There's something enigmatic about it. There's something, there's a bit of a puzzle in it. What does that mean?

Well, I think that Martyn Lloyd-Jones comes closer, much closer in helping us understand it. He asked the same question I did when he said and I quote, he says, "What does Paul mean by life?" Then he goes and he answers his own question. "He means the supreme thing in life, the thing for which and by which he lives. He means the thing that controls the whole of his life." Continuing the quote, the great doctor said this, "Life does not just mean eating and drinking and sleeping and rising and doing my work or job in life. That is not what Paul means by life." What he means is this, what are our real interests? Well, with Paul it was Christ. It was always Christ in the center. The question is what is your interest, what motivates you, what are you concerned about in life? What is it that shapes your perspective on everything else? What is at the core of your heart and the core of your being? On Tuesdays we've been talking a bit about the crucial essential nature of worldviews and how you view what happens in life and how you interpret life. What's at the core there, that's the question. What's at the core of how you interpret life and assign meaning to it. You know, if we were all honest and none of us are going to be this honest and brutally honest about it, what gives life to meaning to so much of us especially in our weaker moments even as Christians, is our personal comfort, financial matters, maybe athletics are really important to us, whether it's a professional team or what someone in the family is doing, and life centers around all of that, and if those things are going well and are prosperous, then life is great. If those things are not going well, then we're kind of downcast. What is life? What does life mean and what does it mean to live in light of Christ? That's the question.

And you know what, beloved, and what I love about God's word is that you don't need a doctorate in Greek or Hebrew to understand this. You can read God's word for yourself and see it stated plainly and I'm going to help point this out to you. What is life to Paul in the context of the book of Philippians? What is life to us? The answers are identical to us. Paul is explaining throughout the book of Philippians what he means by life and what it means to live is Christ, and here's what we're going to see this morning, this is actually I think going to be a fairly simple message with the potential by the help of the Holy Spirit to utterly transform the way that you think about your existence during the window of life that the Lord gives to you here and that you have remaining. What is life? Three things. These aren't my points yet, I'm just giving you the perspective that I think we need. We can think about it, we can think about life in vertical terms, in terms of our presence before God. Vertical terms before God. We can think about life in horizontal terms before men and in our human relationships, and we can think about it in, let's say, material terms, in terms of our responsibilities and the duties that we have in life and what we are to do. Vertically before God, horizontally before men, and then in the duties and the

provision of life all of these things find their center, their focus in Christ, and it's found in the way that Paul writes even in the book of Philippians.

Now look, I want to make a really important interpretive point for you here and this is a whole matter of the way that you approach reading the Bible and reading books of the Bible. When Paul sat down and he wrote the book of Philippians or dictated it to his scribe to be transmitted to the Philippians, he had things in his mind, he had whole matters of thought that he was going to express, and especially under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit there is a unity of thought and there are things that are woven together throughout the book and the book gives a context for understanding individual statements that are made so that when Paul talks about Christ elsewhere in the book of Philippians, and especially when he talks about Christ in relationship to the way that he is viewing certain things in life, then we are getting an idea of what he means when he says to live is Christ, and what we find when you read the book of Philippians without any special prior knowledge, is that you find Paul putting Christ at the center of every dimension of life. I mean, you know, once you say life in the presence of God, life in all of our relationships before men, and life with our material circumstances, I don't know, there's not a whole lot left, right? This is pretty comprehensive and what Paul is saying here, the gist of what he's saying, the essence that is behind it is that we love Christ in response to his love for us. We love him for his person, that he is fully God and fully man in one person. We love him for his work. He did the work of redemption on our behalf. He saved us from our sins and we love him for that and we love him for his character, for his holiness, for his grace, for his mercy, for his kindness, for the love by which he gave himself up for us. It's a wholehearted love in response to a wholehearted recognition of the person of Christ, the work of Christ and the character of Christ. This goes everywhere and here's what I want you to see is that properly understood, to live is Christ means that there is no part of life that is untouched by his redemption. There is no part of your life as a Christian that is untouched by who Christ is and what he has done, and all of this tends toward, informs, strengthens you in edification and in sanctification.

So here's how we're going to approach it. Three parts in our time remaining. First of all, to live is Christ means, is considering Christ as our righteousness. Christ as our righteousness before God. Now look, this is really really crucial because as I read earlier from the letter of James, we all stumble in many ways and you and I both know the weight that comes upon us when I say, "Oh, why did I do that? Why did I say that? What does God, how, this is not good." And you have that weight of guilt upon you and you say, "How am I to respond to this?" And you just want to go into a corner and you want to hide and you think maybe if I just wait two or three or four days then, you know, maybe God will kind of, it'll kind of slip off his radar because he's moved on to other things. Well beloved, that's a miserable way to live. Some of you know it by direct personal experience, you know, I knew it for a long time.

And let's just back up and go, let's just start from the beginning one more time here. Apart from Christ, you nor I have any hope before God. We don't have any hope for God. You and I have broken God's law, death and judgment awaits unforgiven sinners, and here's the question then in the context of Philippians, how then do we have any hope before

God? On what basis do we have security that he accepts us and receives us and will not hold our sins against us? Well beloved, to live is Christ and Paul makes this plain in Philippians 3.

Now Paul is writing from a perspective in Philippians 3, he's remembering all of the good Jewish things that had marked his life before he came to Christ. He was a Jew. He was circumcised the eighth day. He was a Pharisee. He was meticulous about the law. He was zealous. He was blameless before men. Then look at what he says in verse 7, he says, "But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ." Do you see Christ in the center of it? And then he goes on, he bores deeply, he drills deeply into this reality of what Christ and his righteousness mean in life to him so that he says in verse 8, "More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." He says, "You know, I had all of these Jewish things to my credit but now I look at them as distractions and things that actually were keeping me from God," and he says, "More than any of my own righteousness, I have something of far greater value, I have Christ and I know Him. That is the surpassing value."

Going on in verse 8 he says, "for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him." Now watch this, Paul speaking as a Christian here says, "not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith." Paul says, "My righteousness before God has nothing to do with my personal merit. My righteousness before God is found in the person of Christ and is received by faith. Christ is my righteousness before God. Christ is the reason that God accepts me. Christ is the reason that I know my sins will never be held against me."

And what he is saying here and what the essence of the Gospel is this, let's put it in the second person here for those of you that are Christians, Christ has provided for you a righteousness that perfectly satisfies a holy God. He has given his kind of righteousness, his very righteousness to you. It has been given to you as a gift and that gift not only secures your salvation in a moment of time, it secures the foundation of your entire walk with God while you go through life on earth, and that righteousness of Christ is unwavering, it is perfect, it is stable, it is eternal, and that means that God accepts you on the basis of a perfect righteousness not on the basis of your fluctuating behavior, not on the basis of your fluctuating emotions so that if you feel really gooey toward God he is especially warm toward you, but if you feel distant or you've got a bad attitude, now he wants, you know, now it's hands off and he steps back from you. Beloved, that's not it. The whole basis on which God saves you and the whole basis upon which he accepts you is found in Christ and in your union with him.

And that means this, beloved, and hear me carefully: this righteousness of Christ is not something that you earn through religion, it is not something that you earn through morality so that you're good enough and God says, "Oh, that's pretty good. I'll take you in." That's not it. That's not Christ. That's not life. And beloved, what's especially sweet for those of you who like me know what it's like to stumble more often than you would

care publicly to admit, is that this righteousness of Christ is not lost, it is not forfeited through your sin or your stumbles. Christ loved you before the foundation of the world. Christ loved you and did everything necessary for your redemption before you were even born, before your parents even came together, the work of redemption was accomplished. And that means it cannot be forfeited once it is received and it means that going forward, that you have in Christ a life righteousness that satisfies God that is never taken away, and God deals with you and accepts you on the basis of the righteousness of Christ, not on your fluctuating behavior. That's huge to understand. It's not a righteousness of personal merit, it's the righteousness of Christ received by faith.

Now to live is Christ. To live is Christ means that we have a righteousness that is a foundation and the basis upon which we are received by God. Stay with me here because this is important. Jesus Christ is the only basis upon which God accepts anyone. It's the basis on which he accepts you and me. He is our life, by which we mean to be in Christ is to be accepted by God forever. As Scripture says in the book of Hebrews, God promises, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." Scripture says in Psalm 32, "How blessed is he whose transgression has been forgiven." You see, when we think vertically about God and we realize who Christ is and what he has done for us, this means that we have a security in Christ. No one can pluck us out of his hand. He will never cast us away, he said. This means that before God Christ is our righteousness and he is the righteousness upon which God accepts us forever. Do you know what that means for life? I'll tell you. I'm glad you're here. Most of you are going to be glad you were here to hear things like this from God's word. Do you know what this means for Christ, to live is Christ in the presence of God? It means that Christ – watch this, beloved – it means that Christ is the end of your fear of condemnation from God. Christ became a curse for us. Christ bore the condemnation on our behalf. The wrath of God against your sin has been satisfied in Christ so that there is no longer any fear of condemnation. I'm not making this up, it's what Paul said in Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." I want to tell you, that's good news. Telling a stumbling bum like me to be good and to be kind to each other with no reference to Christ is bad news. My problem is that I'm not kind and that I don't love like I should. That's your problem too. The good news of Christ is our life is that Christ has done what is necessary to take away your sin, shame and guilt, and God accepts you on the basis of his beloved Son.

So it's the end of our fear of condemnation. Listen to me carefully, Christ is the end of trying to be good enough so that God will accept you. He's the end of all of that. God accepts us in Christ. And I'll say it one more time, beloved, it is on the basis of a life that you did not live and on the basis of a death that you did not die that God counts you righteous in Christ, and that positional reality becomes the living basis upon which we walk through life with a sense of joy and security before a holy God. "I am accepted in Christ. God has forgiven all of my sin. I am counted as righteous. I have no fear in death. I have no fear of the day of judgment because Christ has paid it all. He loves me and He'll never let me go." I want to tell you, you can live with that. As you'll see next week, you can die with that. You can't really live with anything else and you certainly can't die without it. Christ in righteousness is our life.

Now secondly, let's consider this in the terms of Christ in our relationships. Christ in our relationships. How is Christ our life in our relationships. Well, Christ is our life in our horizontal relationships with men and just sticking with the book of Philippians, I want you to see we're just looking, we're just staying right within the four corners of the book of Philippians here today. I'm not directing you anyplace else. You can go home and read Philippians in 15 or 20 minutes, read it several times in the coming week and these things just lift off the page to you. Paul mentions Christ either by the name Christ, Jesus or Lord 73 times in the four chapters of these books. Christ is everything.

Now picking it up in chapter 2, verse 3, Christ in our relationships, Philippians 2:3, Paul 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." The breadth of that statement is just astonishing to me because all of a sudden it has given us direction, comprehensive direction for comprehensively every relationship in life, particularly within the body of Christ. But we see that the word of God comes and with remarkable brevity says things that have implications for everyone that you know and everyone that you interact with, particularly in the body of Christ. These are instructions that work toward the unity and stability of the church which we addressed in recent weeks and I won't repeat here. But notice this, beloved, sometimes I get demonstrative up here, it's because I really, do you know why I get demonstrative on these things? It's because I really believe them. I believe the word of God and it matters and I want you to believe it too. I want this to affect you too like it affects and grips my own heart. So I can't preach in a dry, distant, academic manner. It's impossible and I'd rather die first than to preach as a dead man before living men with living souls.

Now having seen the breadth of these things, he addresses humility and looking out for others in your personal relationships, he doesn't leave it there as though it were some moral, mere moral exhortation, be kind to each other, don't be selfish. No, he states the principle and then he brings Christ right into it with force, with clarity, with the power of the Holy Spirit guiding his very pen. Look at what he says in verse 5, "Have this attitude in yourselves," what attitude? The attitude he was just talking about in verses 3 and 4, this attitude of regarding one another as more important than yourselves. Where is the life in that? What gives the power, the impetus, the motivation to live that way? "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus." And Christ is immediately inserted in the middle of all of your human relationships and he addresses his person and work, he says, "who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Stop there, beloved, and listen to me. Paul has just exhorted his readers, exhorted the Christian church to live in humility before one another and place the interests of others ahead of your own. He enforces that exhortation by coming back to the example of Christ and what did Christ do, Christ though he existed in the form of God, though he dwelt in Triune glory in heaven with the adoration of angels all around him, in perfect communion

with his Father from all of eternity, Christ left that great perfect environment and at personal cost and with personal humility came down to earth and took on humanity and he spent decades, three and a half decades roughly speaking, he spent decades walking on this earth, living in subjection to human parents whose brains he made, working with his hands in a carpenter shop, walking in his public ministry, teaching clueless disciples and entering the taunts of his enemies, marching all the way to Calvary where he humbled himself to the point of death, even death on a cross, the lowest most despicable form of death, the most shameful death that this world has ever known. That's what Christ did. That's what the Son of God did, beloved, he humbled himself like that and why? What did he gain out of that? Well, in one sense, there was nothing in it personally for him, it was far better for him where he came from but he voluntarily came down to do this. And why did he do it? Well, we can oversimplify it by saying this: it's because he put the interests of his people ahead of what was personally convenient. He put the interests of his people ahead of his own experience of glory. He laid aside his experience and the prerogatives of glory for a time in order to live a life of human perfection that would shape him and give him the basis upon which to offer that life on the cross for sinners like you. That's humility.

You see, look at verse 3 with me again. In acting this way, in doing what Christ did, he regarded his people as more important than himself. Can you imagine? I just want to say, "But Jesus, stop! Don't You realize who You are? You're the King of glory. You are the most important one in the universe. And would You wash our feet? Would You bleed on a cross for our sins? Christ, You would do that, You would humble Yourself to that extent so that my interests might be advanced, so that my sins might be forgiven, so that my heaven might be secured? You would do that? Lord, let me bow before You. Let me fall on my face before You and kiss Your feet." And the response of that is what we're responding to is the humility of Christ.

So beloved, here's the way that this works out, to live is Christ in the context horizontally of your human relationships, what Paul is saying is this, is that he looks at Christ and he sees the supremacy of Christ and the supremacy of what he did for guilty sinners and that if Christ, the glorious one, would humble himself for the body of Christ, humble himself for his people, then his people should have a like attitude toward their human relationships as well. If Christ can put your interests ahead of his own in going to the cross then, beloved, you and I can put the interests of others ahead of our own in the way that we live our lives. That's the essence of what is being said here.

So beloved, and so beloved, we look to Christ and we love him for what he did and then that spills over in the way that we orient our life in our circle of relationships. Your union with Christ defines how to live out those relationships and, beloved, let me just say that your union with Christ gives you the power to live out those relationships in that way. It is because of that that you can live with a difficult spouse. It is because of that that you can respond well to parents who might frustrate you. It is because of that that you can bear with your children as they sort these things out in their own mind. Christ, to live is him.

So vertically our righteousness before God, Christ. Horizontally the way that we approach all of our relationships in life, Christ. Thirdly, we can put it this way, Christ in our responsibilities. Christ in our responsibilities or you could say Christ in our resources, just as long as you keep it saying "our," you know, you can just build it around that as long as you continue the alliteration. Christ in responsibilities. Our life in the flesh, beloved, is a pursuit of becoming like Christ. Having seen what our Savior is like, having been redeemed by him in response to that we want to be conformed to his image and the Spirit of God works to conform us evermore to his image.

So Paul says in Philippians 3:12 as he's looking at what he's doing in life, he says, "Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect," Philippians 3:12. I'll give you a moment to find it. Philippians 3:12, "Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus." He says, I'm living life to lay hold of my goal that for which Christ saved me, and this is why I live life. Christ's salvation has defined my purpose in life." Verse 13, "Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Paul says, "Whatever comes at me in life, whatever the future holds for me in life, my orienting purpose, my orienting focus through all of that is to always remember the centrality of Christ like that, to be conformed, to be made more and more like him while I walk these dusty roads on earth." So that everything that comes in life which we saw just recently in our doctrine of providence, let me just remind you as I fall back on things that we taught in the recent past, that the doctrine of divine providence means that God has perfectly ordered your circumstances and he has given you the life that you now have with the intention, Christian, with the intention that you would pursue Christ-likeness in the midst of that. In the midst of your weakness. In the midst of your prosperity. In the midst of your good days. In the midst of your bad days. Always oriented toward Christ in your responsibilities in the life that he's given you, and finding your strength and power in this as you face that adversity, that the Christ who loved you and gave himself for you at the cross is the same Christ that is with you now to sustain you, to bless you, to keep you, to sanctify you now. He saved you to be with you. There's a sense in which Christ saved you to be with you. Then in the midst of adversity, in the midst of the shifting and changing things of life, provision comes, provision goes, material blessings rise and fall like the ocean tides, the Apostle Paul says that even in that, Christ is enough. Christ is my life.

Look at chapter 4 verse 11 as he's thanking them for a gift that they gave them. He says, "I know how to get along with humble means and I also know how to live in prosperity. In any and every circumstance," comprehensive statement, beloved, "in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." He says, "I am content in Christ whether I have a lot or if I have a little, whether I'm wealthy or whether I'm on the verge of bankruptcy. Christ satisfies me. Christ is my life. I rely on Him. I find my life in Him. He is what interests me. He is what I love. He is what satisfies me and I am so," Paul says, "I am so completely satisfied in Christ that my

earthly circumstances are incidental. I have a lot, great, but do you know what? It was always about Christ. I've got a little, you know what? I haven't suffered any loss because I have Christ and in Christ I have everything. I have everything that I want. I have everything that my soul needs. I have everything that my soul requires. It's all in Christ. He's my life," is what he is saying.

Do you know what else this means, beloved? I mean, I'll just trust the Holy Spirit to help you apply this in every aspect of life that you need it, but do you know what this means in life? It means that even when we in one way or another lose people that are close to us, people move away, children move out of the house, we say goodbye in their passing, that even then Christ is enough, that even then our soul has what it needs in him.

So beloved, whether it's our righteousness before God, whether it's your relationships with men, whether it's your responsibilities in life, here's what I want you to see: to live is Christ, Paul said, Christ is the unifying presence in it all, the unifying presence vertically, horizontally, circumstantially. Christ is the unifying purpose in it all. Soli Deo Gloria, to God alone be the glory. My life, to God, you alone be glory. Before men, Paul said, "I'm a servant of all. In circumstances I'm content whether it's a lot or a little." All of that unified by the presence of Christ and finding its purpose in Christ, responding to the great prior work of love that he did in saving our souls.

So beloved, I can only end with a question: is Christ himself life to you? Do you know Christ like this? Do you love him like this? This is real Christianity. Everything else is a false counterfeit. Is Christ your love and interest in life? Beloved, I'm not asking you, please understand I'm not asking you whether you keep busy spiritually. I'm not asking you whether you can tick the box on your quiet time or anything like that, I'm asking what your heart loves the most, where you find your meaning and purpose in life. Paul says, "For to me, to live is Christ." It's not whether we're keeping busy spiritually. Martha was plenty busy spiritually and the Lord had to rebuke her. He said, "Mary's chosen the better part, Martha. You're busy and distracted by so many things." People want so many activities and programs at a church. I'm not sure those things are really necessary when you really love Christ and know him.

So the question is: are you alive to this one who saves sinners by grace, because to the true Christian, to the Apostle Paul, to live is Christ.

*Father, we ask You to help us to understand, help us to apply, help us to live. Lord Jesus, You are our life. You are our all in all and I pray that Your Spirit would graciously bring those outside of You today to the saving faith of which we have so inadequately and weakly spoken. Give life and strength to Your word in the hearts of all who hear and fulfill Your purposes in us to Your glory. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

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