

# To Live is Christ, to Die is Gain

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 09 July 2017

Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[ 0 : 00 ] Amen. Well, thank you so much to everyone who's participated so far in our service. I hope it's been encouraging to you. It's been encouraging to me as I've sat there and listened to just tale after tale of God's faithfulness.

And just when you thought you'd seen everything from Fraser, a video link. I mean, I'd love to tell you I had the Apostle Paul video link here, but I don't. If you have Philippians chapter 1 open in front of you, it's going to be so helpful.

So, Philippians chapter 1 verses 12 to 26 that Margo so helpfully read for us is where we're going to be this morning. But to get us thinking as we kick off, I thought we'd play a little game called Whose Motto Is It Anyway?

So I'm going to put some mottos on the screen and I want to see if anybody out there can guess whose mottos these are. So here's the first one. Live each day as if it were your last.

Any idea? So it's Steve Jobs. Next one. Think big and get the job done. Mr. Trump.

[ 1 : 03 ] Above all, to thine own self be true. Now, maybe some of the old English might give it away there. Anybody? It's Shakespeare.

I'm not as cultured as you are, so I'm sticking to the good ones. No matter what happens in life, be good to people would be Taylor Swift. And then lastly, the one that has been in my head for the last little while and I can't seem to get it out is this one.

No right, no wrong. The rules for me. I'm free. Anybody? Anybody? So this is Elsa from Frozen. I can't get it out of my head.

I wonder if you have a motto in life. A way that you understand the world, a principle that you live by. Because this morning, what we're going to see is we're going to see a man with a motto.

If your Bible's there, then look at verse 21 of, sorry, verse 21 of chapter 1. Here is the Apostle Paul. The man whose life has been flipped upside down and turned inside out by the risen Jesus Christ.

[ 2 : 17 ] In verse 21, we see his motto in life. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

This is the way he understands the world. This is the principle that he lives by. Now just before we dive into the passage this morning, I want you to think about that motto.

Maybe here this morning and you wouldn't call yourself a Christian. Well, can I say how welcome you are? I love that you're here. I just challenge you this morning to think about your own life.

What motto do you try and live by? As you hear the Apostle Paul this morning, I want you to ask yourself, why does this man live and why does he think like this?

Maybe you're here this morning and you would call yourself a Christian. Well, the challenge to you this morning is to assess your life according to this man's motto.

[ 3 : 25 ] And so in the time that we have left this morning, I just want us to see how this motto has shaped Paul. Because I think in these verses we see that it shaped him in four different ways.

Now remember Paul isn't sitting in his armchair with his pipe and slippers thinking philosophical thoughts. As he pens his motto, we saw a few weeks ago, didn't we, that he's in prison.

And you'll notice it, if you've got the text there, that he uses the word chains. Or if you've got an ESV, it's imprisonment. He uses it three times in those preceding four verses. And he wants the Philippians to know something.

That's how he opens it here, verse 12, to know something. To know that despite his chains, not only has he not abandoned that motto, but actually he's seeing the truth of it living right out, playing right out in front of him.

And here's the first way that this motto has shaped Paul, verses 12 to 14. It's shaped his attitudes. Notice the little phrase that he uses halfway through verse 16, which I think is the key to understanding what is going on here.

[ 4 : 38 ] What does he write? I am put here. I am put here.

Now remember when I was growing up, one of my favorite computer games to play was called Theme Hospital. The game, you literally constructed your own hospital. You hired your own staff. And whenever you used to survey your hospital, and whenever there was a sick patient at this side of your hospital, sometimes it had a bloaty head, if you remember the game, what you would do is you would survey the hospital, and you would find a doctor, and you would put the mouse on the doctor.

Remember those things called mouses? And you would drag the doctor, and you would put him next to the patient. Because you wanted him to do a job.

Well, I'm reminded here, as I read these words of Paul, I'm reminded of Theme Hospital. Because Paul is saying that he's not just caught a bad break. He's not suffering from a case of nice guys finish last.

[ 5 : 42 ] This is God working out his divine purposes in Paul's life. Paul has been put here in this prison by God.

And so Paul says, Dear Philippians, know that me being in prison is not hindering the gospel. Actually, God is using this to advance the spread of the gospel.

Now, how does that work? Well, Paul tells us how. In fact, he gives us two hows, if you see them in the verses there. Firstly, verse 13. Because Paul has been put here, the whole imperial guard have heard about Jesus.

Now, try and use your imaginations this morning. Picture this scene. Paul is under house arrest. He's under the supervision of, and he's most likely chained to, a Roman soldier.

Now, does Paul strike you as the kind of guy, as he was chained to this soldier, who would be speaking to him about the weather? Do you not think that Paul savored, and he seized the opportunity to tell that guard about Jesus Christ?

[ 7 : 02 ] And when that guard finished his shift, which commentators will tell us, it was about four hours long, before it rotated round, and another guard came along, do you not think Paul seized and savored and rejoiced in yet another opportunity to tell another guard about Jesus?

And on and on this went until the whole imperial guard has heard about the risen Jesus Christ. Now, picture these soldiers. They're on their lunch break, and they're asking each other, what do you make of this guy?

This little man with his big ideas? I cannot fathom it. He's in prison, not because he's done anything wrong. He's in prison because he believes in a man.

You see, here is Paul. What is he doing? He's not just grinning and bearing the circumstances that have come his way in life. Here is Paul turning those circumstances around for the glory of God. And to see how God is at work here, to see how he's at work, bigger picture, these Roman soldiers are never going to come to an evangelistic event put on by Rome Evangelical Church. Never going to darken the door of a church.

[ 8 : 12 ] So they will not come to Paul. What does God do? Okay. Paul, I'll put you there with them. What a wonderful truth to be reminded of this morning when it comes to God's sovereign logic in evangelism.

Just think about your own life for a minute. Where does God put you? Who in his divine sovereignty and in his divine purposes has he put in your life, in your office, in your class, in your camp, in your street, in your team, where has God placed you for his glory?

Second thing Paul wants the Philippians to know, verse 14, is that because of his example in prison, the other brothers have become more bold to speak about Jesus Christ.

So presumably as they've watched Paul go for it, they have dared to preach the gospel. Great word there if you've got it there. Dare. My prayer this week for my own life was, Lord, would you help me to dare more?

So I want you to know, Philippians, I want you to know that me being here in chains is not game over. It's game on. Do you see how his motto has shaped his attitudes?

[ 9 : 36 ] Secondly, verses 15 to 18, it shaped his ambition. Paul's clearly heard that there are some people out there who are preaching the same message as him, preaching Christ, but they're doing so with skewed motives.

So certain individuals are seeking to take advantage of his current predicament in prison, looking to make themselves known, looking to make themselves look great, and seizing the opportunity with

Paul off the scene to make themselves look big, rather than being occupied with making Christ look big.

And Paul says, that attitude, those motives, that ambition, is ugly. I don't know if you saw it in the news this week, I'd be very impressed if anyone did.

There's a football team down in London called Wickham Wanderers, and they've just released their new goalkeeping talk for the season. So distractingly ugly, that it's meant to put opposition strikers off.

Paul is saying that there's people walking about, and by the way they're behaving, they may well be preaching Christ, but as they do that, it's almost like they're walking around clothed in that Wickham Wanderers goalie top.

[10:53] You, by the way you live, Philippians, you, clothe yourself in the exact opposite. By your speech, by your conduct, by your way of life, don't put people off.

As you make Jesus known, draw people to him by living in a way which makes him look beautifully attractive. That's the mindset that you've got to adopt. It's incredible, actually, the more you get to grips with what Paul is saying in this letter, how often he comes back to this theme of mindset, to think differently.

We'll see it so beautifully drawn out next week as we come to chapter 2. Paul says to them, your mindset is to be that of Christ, of humility, of love.

No room for envy, no room for rivalry, no room for quarreling. Your life's marked by humility and love. Your ambition in life as God's people is not to make yourself known, like these people.

You live and I live to make Christ known. That's what matters to Paul. And I think it's a sobering reminder at this point, isn't it, that as Christians, we can have all the right words and serve in the church, even, in all the right ways, but completely miss the point.

[12:16] That we serve Christ with bitterness brewing in our hearts, that we preach Jesus with resentment lurking. So it's a reminder this morning to be checking our own hearts for our motives.

Don Carson, he writes this, really powerful words, all of us would be wiser if we would resolve never to put people down except on our prayer list.

Paul's motto, which has shaped his ambition in life, second half of verse 18, to verse 21. Thirdly, it's shaped his approach in life.

Paul rejoices in what he knows. Do you see that? In what he knows. What does he know? Well, we saw it last week with Tim, if you remember, that we saw what Paul was praying for these Philippians.

Well, here he rejoices because he knows that they are praying for him. They are praying for him. And you see the wonderful little truth for us here that's embedded in these verses.

[13:27] Here are this little house church in Philippi, meeting in Lydia's house. This little church, what are they doing? They are on their knees before God, pleading for their brother, Paul.

You can picture it, can't you? What are they praying? What are they asking? Lord, would you protect our brother? Lord, would you strengthen our brother? Lord, would you be so gracious to our brother? Lord, would you give Paul the, by your spirit, living in him, would you give him the words to say when he gets the chance to speak about you?

Father, would you put good people around Paul who can encourage him as he continues on in the faith? Here is this little church wrestling in prayer for their brother who's in chains.

And I must say, I've been really struck and encouraged this week by the vulnerability that Paul shows here in prayer.

Particularly, I think, when contrasted with what he's just penned about the worldly ambitions of others. Now, I don't know about you, but I always find it baffling, is that the right word, to read that Paul asks others to pray for him.

[14:41] Because in my mind, if ever there was a guy who I kind of think would be okay without prayer for evangelism, then it's Paul. But no, says Paul, I need your prayers, dear Philippians.

They strengthen me. They are so precious to me to know that you're praying for me. Thank you so much for them and please would you keep them coming. Maybe something for all of us to do off the back of this morning is to ask somebody here, before you go, maybe just one person, how you can be praying for them this week.

And then flip it around. Why don't you try and tell one person how they can be praying for you this week. I find it so, in my own life, I find it so encouraging to know that people are praying for me.

You know, when our little girl Grace was in hospital, the prayers of the people in this church family, the texts that you sent us, the emails that you sent us, the phone calls, they were so precious to us. We're working to make it a feature of our monthly prayer meetings when we gather together on a Wednesday to pray for other churches in the city. On Wednesday night, just gone, we were praying for the new church plant out at Esk Valley.

[ 15 : 56 ] And I just emailed my friend Tom, the minister there, during the weekend and said, how can we be praying for you? And he just sent a list of things to pray for. But his first line was just, thank you so much. Those prayers mean so much to us.

As we've heard this morning, we were celebrating 50 years of God's faithfulness to this church family. That's quite incredible when you think about it. Not the weird great, but he's great. 50 years. Well, let's strive as a church family to ensure that prayer remains very much part of the fabric of this church. and part of the very core DNA of who we are.

And let's keep striving to come to our great God in prayer. Charles Spurgeon, prayer pulls the rope below and the great bell rings in the ears of God above.

But some scarcely stir the bell. Others give but an occasional pluck at the rope. But he who wins with heaven is the man who grasps that rope boldly and pulls continually with all his might.

[ 17 : 05 ] Friends, as we journey on whatever happens to us, let's commit ourselves to being a church family who pulls that rope. Our great God.

You see, Paul knows that he's not embarked on a solo mission for Jesus. He knows that mission for Christ is a spirit-empowered team pursuit. And what a joy for him to know that these Philippians, even though they are miles away from him, are spending themselves in praying for him, asking, you see it there, that he might be delivered.

Delivered from prison, delivered at the end of his life. Paul's probably got both in his mind. And in that, he rejoices. And you see what he wants, verse 20, for Jesus to be exalted.

Now, what does that mean? Well, it means that Paul is devoting himself to being a walking and talking telescope. His life is about making Christ look bigger.

And how will Christ be exalted in Paul? Do you see what he says? In my body. Paul's logic there must be reflecting on the Jesus who has literally given his body for Paul.

[ 18 : 26 ] The Jesus who died to save this wretch of a sinner who previously cursed his very name and lived to destroy his people. Paul now turns and says, that Christ, that Christ, I'm giving myself the totality of myself for his cause.

There's a famous story told of a pig and a chicken standing in a field and a bus passes them. And on the side of the bus is the picture, just picture of eggs and bacon.

The slogan underneath reads, eggs and bacon, the great British breakfast. And the chicken turns to the pig and says, look pig, we're going to be famous. And the pig turns back to the chicken and says, true, but for you to be famous you only need to make a small contribution.

For me, well I need to give my whole life. Here is Paul. Giving his whole life for Christ. The lyrics that Isaac Watts penned all those years ago, love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.

Paul's motto has shaped his approach. And fourthly and lastly at verses 22 to 26, he's shaped his aim. As he contemplates life, he's torn to die and, do you see how he's torn here?

[ 19 : 53 ] To die and to go and be with the Lord. How does he describe it? End of verse 23. Far better. He wants to, he longs to be with his Savior.

But he also wants to see these Philippians progress in the faith, be filled with that inexpressible joy that comes through knowing Jesus Christ. See how it's win-win for him?

He can't lose here. For him, it's not about choosing life or choosing death. Life is about choosing Christ. Now again, call me weird, but I was trying to get inside the passage when I preach.

Trying to picture myself as one of Paul's guards this week. It seems to me that Paul must have been one of the most irritating men that they could ever have looked after in their whole time as a guard.

Imagine the conversation, Paul, would you stop talking about Jesus? And he looks at them and says, no, because for me to live is Christ. Okay, if you don't stop talking about Jesus, we'll kill you.

[ 20 : 56 ] Well, that's great. Because for me to die is gain. What do you do with this guy? How irritating and yet, do you see the point? How attractive is this?

I asked you at the start to think about your own life motto and think about Paul's motto for life. Here is a man in chains, but think about it. Here is a man in chains and yet, here is the most free man I think I've ever come across.

This isn't always look on the bright side of life. This is not hakuna matata. Here is a man fully convinced that Jesus Christ is more precious and more trustworthy than anything else in his life. And as I've reflected on it in my own life this week and as I've pondered his motto, I've found myself and I hope you found yourself this morning as well coming up well short of that. How often do we just get caught up in longing for and living for the temporary things of this world?

How often do we as the psalmist would say in Psalm 1, how often do we just chase chaff? Living for that dream home, living for the kids to get into that school, living for the new car, living for that holiday, living for that iPhone 7.

[ 22 : 14 ] Guess what happens after the iPhone 7? There's an iPhone 8. Living for that retirement package, living for that holiday in the south of Spain. Do you see how Paul's motto this morning calls us back to living lives that matter for the glory of Jesus Christ.

What is life all about for Paul? It's about living for Christ, to know him, to know forgiveness, to know sins paid for and sins cancelled, to know life through this man and living to make him known.

So here is Paul this morning saying to us very clearly through Philippians that there is no better and no freer way to live than to adopt this as your motto.

And of course there's no secret to this. If I want to see the world like Paul sees the world, then I need to see Jesus Christ like he sees Jesus Christ.

The secret every day is to turn my eyes upon Jesus and to look full in his wonderful face and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in light of his glory and grace.

[ 23 : 37 ] As we close I was reminded of the great story of Jim Elliot the American missionary who in 1956 takes the gospel to an unreached tribe in Ecuador and he and his four traveling companions tragically martyred by the people there and Jim famously penned in his journal his life motto that he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.

Great motto. Great motto. A famous motto. You google Jim Elliot you will get literally thousands probably even hundreds of thousands of hits.

He was even on the BBC News recently as he commemorated his death but if you google his brother Bert Elliot you get 70 hits. Bert was asked how he dealt with living in the shadow his famous brother the Christian himself and he said this and we'll close with this some wonderful wonderful words he says in the kingdom of God there is a great need for streaking meteors that's his brother Jim streaking meteors but the reality is most of us won't be that we will instead be faint stars husbands and fathers wives and mothers we will be accountants and teachers businessmen and students we will go through life day after day doing very much the same thing as we did yesterday but the important thing for us to remember is that we are needed there is a great need for people willing to chase the little donkeys of life not because it's exciting because they believe in the constant presence and purposes of God there is a great need for people willing to stand in the midst of the boring convinced that there is no such thing as ordinary when you follow an extraordinary

God now I love that quote because that is the story for most of us here this morning isn't it most of us are not going to be streaking meteors none of us are going to have our names in lights none of us are going to have thousands hundreds of thousands of hits on Google we are these everyday people that he's talking about but everyday people whom God has called to make this motto our own and to bring this motto that we've seen in Philippians with us into the everyday not because we are great but because Christ is great as for me says Paul I have made it my life's refrain that to live is Christ and to die is gain let's pray together so father thank you for this morning and thank you just for the wonderful reminder that this is not about us it's about you your faithfulness your grace your steadfast love that endures forever so lord by your grace and by your spirit living in us would you help us this week in our lives to know the joy of Paul's motto that we've seen here and may it be our mindset that to live is Christ and to die is gain and it's in Jesus wonderful and precious name that we pray these things amen