

Sermon outline:

To die is gain, because we live in Christ.

Reading: Philippians 1: 21 - 26.

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...to live is Christ and to die is gain...

Introduction:

Paul said, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." What do these words mean to you, for us? They are words of encouragement. They teach us that for those of us who know Christ as our life, to die is to gain.

We don't like to be reminded that one day we will die. One of the reasons why death is so frightening to us, is that many people really don't know for sure what will happen when they die. I am told that in a British cemetery is a tombstone, which bears the following epitaph:

*Pause, Stranger, when you pass me by,
As you are now, so once was I
As I am now, so you will be,
So prepare for death and follow me.*

An unknown passer-by read those words and underneath scratched this reply:

*To follow you I'm not content,
Until I know which way you went.*

It is an important question to ask. There are many people who just do not have the answer. They try to avoid the issue. But death is unavoidable. Everyone dies. But it is not true that we do not survive death. We do.

Human beings are created to live forever. The only question is where that eternity will be lived. This is the issue that needs to be settled. When this issue is settled, death will cease to be our enemy.

If death means that I cease to exist, it is my enemy. But if death brings me into a better existence, then I no longer need to fear it. As a matter of fact, resolving the issue of death is essential to life. In other words, ***only when you are ready to die, are you ready to live.***

PAUL SAYS TO DIE IS GAIN!

Paul deals with life and death in this passage.

On the one hand, he is looking forward to the day when he will be with Christ. On the other hand, he sees the needs and opportunities in the lives of others and what he can do to help if he continues to live. There is no doubt that Paul is ready to die.

Are you ready to die?

To be ready to die, we must understand the true nature of death. The first thing we must see is that death is a transition into eternity.

Death is not the end.

Death is the transferral of life from one form of existence to another.

God has created the human spirit to be eternal. The human body is not immortal, so it dies and the spiritual part of us steps into eternity.

But the question then becomes one of our final destination. What kind of eternity are we stepping into? Is it heaven?

The answer to that question depends on your relationship with God. Have I made peace with God, in Jesus Christ? Am I reconciled with God in Christ, on the ground of the cross and his resurrection?

The Bible teaches that those who know Christ as Saviour, will go to heaven.

God has taken incredible measures to see that we do go to be with God for eternity.

He sent Jesus to die on the cross in order to pay the penalty for our sins. He calls us through the Holy Spirit, through his Word, his sacraments, his church, to submit to the Lordship of Jesus.

Christians go to heaven. We will be more alive there than we have ever been. The Bible teaches that the moment we close our physical eyes in death, we open them in the presence of God.

Paul said, "*I desire to depart and be with Christ.*"

When we close our eyes in physical death, we open them in eternity and see our Lord who loves us so much, that he paid our penalty on the cross. We can only imagine what it will be like to be in the presence of Jesus. We will be in the presence of the one who loved us so dearly that he gave his life for us. You will be home with your Lord and Saviour.

The Bible clearly reveals that heaven is a place beyond comprehension. It is a place of perfect life and joy for those who follow Christ. Paul said, "*For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.*"

What then can we gain by dying?

We gain a better body. On the day of Christ's return we receive a glorified, immortal, resurrection body. In this life we experience aging, pain, sickness, and ultimately death. Those are the things that accompany this earthly body. But one day we gain a body that does not grow old, know disease, suffer pain, and can never die.

We gain a better home. Whatever we may have in this life cannot compare with the home that Jesus is preparing for us. (John 14) He said he was going to prepare a dwelling for us so that we could be with him. We can't even imagine the glorious home he prepares for us.

We gain a better fellowship. In this world we live in a family circle and with friends that pass on. Every time someone we love dies, we need to say good bye, again and again. And we are sad about the loss!

But in heaven we will enjoy a reunion with those loved ones. We will have fellowship with all the sanctified believers who departed in Christ. And more importantly, we will have fellowship with the living Jesus and in him, with the glory of God. We will have fellowship with God!

Death is not death if you know the Lord. It is merely a transferral from one existence into another.

WHEN WE ARE READY TO DIE - WE ALSO ARE READY TO LIVE!

When we have settled the issue of our eternal destiny, we are set free to live life to the full. Only then do we understand the real meaning of life. Only then do we understand why we are

here. You are here for a reason. God has a purpose for your life. His purpose is, that as you hold onto his promises, **you will make a difference to his kingdom, in what we want to call a “promise driven life”!**

As Christians, we know that the greatest reaction to God’s promise of eternal life in Christ, is to glorify God in gratefulness and love for him.

This was Paul’s desire. Paul’s desire was to glorify God whether in life or in death. In all things our lives should glorify God.

This is not only about the “church” things we do. This is about everything. We do not only glorify God on Sundays, serving and worshipping God around his Word and Sacrament. We are to glorify God every day of the week in everything we do: in our jobs, our families, our *politics, our sports, our play. In all of our attitudes, actions and plans, we are to glorify God.*

We glorify God when we reflect the life of Christ through our lives. In every situation that we face, we need to ask ourselves what Jesus would have us do. This is really the essence of following Jesus. As we obey the leading of the Holy Spirit, through his Word, our lives will glorify God. We will surrender to Christ, the King.

We need to remember, as Paul did, that we are here for others. While Paul desired to depart and be with Christ, because he believes it is “far better” to be with Christ, he knew there were many more people that needed him:

I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again, your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me. (Philippians 1: 23b - 26 NIV.)

Paul knew that his life was about being here for others. That is why Christ came to us and Paul was following the example of his Lord, giving his life to bring others into the Kingdom of God.

Our lives can make a difference in the lives of others. This is what the church should be about: people caring for one another, people helping one another, people encouraging one another, people serving one another and people showing others that to die is to gain eternal joy and life!

Appeal:

True life is pointing people to Jesus. It is being an encouragement to people to live for Christ. It is sharing the love of Jesus in such practical ways that they may receive him too. Because Jesus saved us and secured for us a home in heaven when we die, we are free to spend our lives living for him.

Because we are ready to die, we can truly begin to live.