

“Lord God, you have appointed me as pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

PHILIPPIANS 1

¹⁸Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, ¹⁹because I know that this will turn out for my deliverance, through your prayer and the support of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. ²⁰This matches my earnest expectation and hope that I will in no way be put to shame, but with all boldness, as always, so even now, Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹Yes, for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²²But if I am to go on living in the flesh, that will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet which should I prefer? I do not know. ²³I am pulled in two directions, because I have the desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far. ²⁴But, it is more necessary for your sake that I remain in the flesh. ²⁵And since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and will continue with all of you, for your progress and joy in the faith. ²⁶And so by my coming to you again, my goal is to give you even more reason to boast in Christ Jesus.

²⁷Just conduct yourselves in a way that is worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come to see you or am absent, I may hear about you that you are standing firm in one spirit, contending together with one soul for the faith of the gospel.



The Christians in their living and dying are like other men and women. They eat and drink and wear clothes like everyone else. They have their joys and sorrows as others have. They are found working in all the various callings and stations in life; they are rich and poor, learned and unlearned, experienced and inexperienced. They have their merits and defects, their faults and failings and infirmities, and they are influenced by their surroundings, just like others who are not Christians.

So also in dying Christians are like everyone else. They die young and they die old. They die sudden deaths and they die lingering deaths. They die at home and they die abroad. They die consciously and unconsciously. In all outward circumstances of living and dying there is no difference between Christians and others. So Jesus Christ says, "*The kingdom of God doesn't come by observation; neither shall men say here it is or there it is, for the kingdom of God is within you*" (Luke 17:21). Romans 14:17, "*For the kingdom of God does not consist of eating and drinking, but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*" The same thing is implied in these words, "*To live is Christ and to die is gain.*" This peculiar happiness of the Christian in life and death is invisible, unseen, in any circumstances of living and dying.

Among Christians, these words flow with comfort. We haven't lost the dead who died. And they who died gained great things. They are delivered from all sorrow and suffering. And that is perhaps the least gain. The most precious gain is that which results from their peculiar relation to Jesus Christ. It comprises all their blessings. So Paul forces us to think about death in a new way, as ...

You Have Christ, One Way Or Another

1. Christians remain in Christ in life

How were things going to turn out for Paul? He wrote Philippians as one of four "prison letters" out of the city of Rome. He had carried out three mission journeys in the Mediterranean lands, and a fourth journey intended from Israel to Rome. This last one included a shipwreck and multiple opportunities to preach the gospel again and again. Now in prison, Paul had plenty of time alone with his thoughts, to consider the prospect of living or dying.

Paul belonged not to himself, but to the Lord. He lived not to himself, but unto Christ. He was willing to live in the flesh, because in the flesh he could serve the Lord. He made all his decisions by bringing them into frame of reference with Christ. He loved the Bible as Christ's work, the Lord's Supper as Christ's sacrament, his dearest friends were brothers of Christ, his sweetest work the performance of Christ's will, his only comfort after his many transgressions and his daily strength the grace of Christ. *Whom had Paul in heaven and on earth but [Christ] (Psalm 73:25)?*

Christ was in Paul's heart and in his walk. To Paul, to live was to use and exercise and express, although in human weakness, the power of Christ's holiness. To him, to live was Christ.

- 2 Corinthians 5:15, "*One died for all; therefore, all died. And he died for all, so that those who live would no longer live for themselves but for him, who died in their place and was raised again.*"
- "*Our life is hid with Christ in God; but when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory,*" Colossians 3:3-4.

Here Christ is our life, but we know so little of Him. There we shall know Him even as we are known by Him (1 Cor. 13:12). It is a happy life on earth, for in it we enjoy His grace. We enjoy a noble life, for it is employed in His service.

The power by which we lay hold of God and walk in holiness is Christ in us. The Christian's real life is a life which Christ lives. We live a life in which Christ is everything to us. Life to us is the way to enjoy Christ and express his goodness and power. "*The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me*" (Gal. 2:20). Everything you can say about Christ, you can say about the baptized into Christ (see Gal. 3:27).

What a glorious life it will be! When we enjoy the fullness of His grace, eternity will be an uninterrupted service of praise. We love to praise Him in this place, but what a shout of joy we will raise when the Lamb is so visible! We desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.

2. Christians stand to gain in death

The apostle says, "To die is gain," not as a man, nor as an apostle, but as a Christian whose life is Christ. Death is gain. Dying is winning.

The unbeliever's death is a total loss. Dying is losing. He loses money and riches, joys and pleasures, expectations and wonders all perish with him in death. His life is lost and he is lost. He is cast into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. He opens his eyes after death to hell and torment.

On the contrary, the Christian is carried to Abraham's side. The Christian's death is all gain. Even his loss in death is gain to the Christian, for he loses all sorrow,

all pain, all weariness, all weakness, all weeping, all failing, all sinning, all fearing, all death he loses in death. What a happy loss! It is no loss at all. It is gain.

The gain is more. It is a superabundance. A Christian gains the crown of righteousness. They strove after righteousness, but always felt their failings in life. In death, they are crowned with it. They gain also the crown of life. All the enemies of their lives – sin, death, the devil – are vanquished and driven from the believers. In death, the crown of life. Call it winning, call it leaping from the bottom to the top, call it turning darkness into light, death into life, and you have not yet expressed the Christian's happy gain in death. You cannot express it. *"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what the Lord has prepared for those who love Him"* (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Such gain, such happiness, such triumph, we may fondly trust, our departed brothers and sisters now enjoy. As Christ was their life, so death is their gain.

Amen.