

Pentecost 3
June 13, 2010

Philippians 1:18b-26
234-413-348-464

The Christian's Motto – "That Christ Be Exalted in My Body"

I. "For to me to live is Christ."

II. "To die is gain."

Dear Christian friends,

Just a quick glance at today's readings makes the point that today's FOCUS is on the **Christian dealing** with death. Death is an inescapable fact of life. **Whether** a person is a Christian or not – **whether** they're young or old or somewhere in between – **whether** they're healthy or sick – we all have to deal with death. And that's NOT JUST deal with death but also be prepared to die. That **preparing can include pre-arranging** your funeral, etc. But **finally** there's ONLY ONE WAY to really deal with and to really be prepared for death – that's the CHRISTIAN way – trusting in Jesus for forgiveness and eternal life in heaven.

We can't avoid death – but we only die ONCE. We live for days and months and years. We need to be prepared to **die** – but we also need to be JUST AS PREPARED to **live**. Paul here shows us how to do both. He gives us the CHRISTIAN'S MOTTO – the phrase that guides our **lives**. The Christian's motto is "THAT CHRIST BE EXALTED IN MY BODY." Paul explains that by saying 1) "**for me to live is Christ**" and 2) "**to die is gain.**"

I. "**For me to live is Christ.**"

"**For me to live is** – is WHAT? Every person needs to fill in that blank for himself – needs to figure out what their life is REALLY ALL about. "**For me to live is**" – is SPORTS – is basketball – fishing? "**For me to live**" is the job – farming – whatever? HOW ABOUT this one – "**for me to live is**" ME! That even sounds horrible, doesn't it? "**For me to live is**" ME! That sounds so horrible – yet for how many people isn't that just the TRUTH – their lives are **all about** themselves? What I want is what really matters to me. That selfishness was BEHIND the very first sin. "Go ahead, Adam and Eve, you do what YOU think is best for you. Don't let God BOSS you around." That selfishness – that IDOLATRY – is really behind every sin. "God may not want me TALKING like this – living like this – treating my spouse/children/parents like that – but TOUGH LUCK! It's my life – and "**for me to live is**" ME!"

"**For me,**" Paul writes, "**for me to live is Christ.**" There once was a time when Jesus was the LAST PERSON Paul **wanted** in his life. Then Paul learned how much he REALLY NEEDED Jesus as his Savior. Paul learned WHO Jesus really is – none other than the eternal Son of God Himself born our brother. Paul learned WHAT Jesus had all done to save him – that Jesus had done everything to save him! Jesus was now EVERYTHING to Paul because without Jesus Paul really had NOTHING. Here in **Jesus' perfect life** is the holiness we all need to **stand acceptable** in God's sight. Here in **Jesus' innocent death** on the cross is the full payment for all our sins – is God's full and free forgiveness of all our sins. Here in **Jesus' shed blood every single one** of our sins is washed away. HERE IN JESUS we have peace with God – we have eternal life in heaven.

Trusting in Jesus as his Savior gave Paul's life a WHOLE NEW MEANING and purpose. Now Paul's motto – his GOAL in life – was that "**Christ be exalted in my body.**" Now for Paul "**for me to live is Christ.**" Paul's life was now all WRAPPED UP in – and it was ALL ABOUT – Jesus.

That didn't make for an EASY LIFE for Paul. People ridiculed and **hated** Paul. Paul was persecuted – beaten – **stoned** – run out of town. **As Paul wrote** this letter he was a prisoner in

Rome – he’s been a prisoner for several years. Yet you won’t find Paul WALLOWING in **self-pity**, “My life stinks – life is so UNFAIR!” ***“For me to live is Christ.”*** Paul wanted nothing more than ***“that Christ be exalted in his body.”***

As Paul wrote this letter he was expecting to be soon released from prison. He expects that but it’s NOT FOR SURE. Paul could still be killed for his Christian faith. **In fact as Paul thinks** about what COULD HAPPEN to him – being set free or being martyred – ***“What shall I choose? I do not know! I desire to depart (die) and be with Christ (in heaven) which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.”***

Notice Paul’s CHRISTIAN attitude. PERSONALLY Paul would rather die and go to heaven. But it would be better FOR THEM if Paul stayed here and served them. Paul’s main concern was **not what DO I WANT** – but what best exalts Jesus and serves His people. More important than Paul’s PERSONAL COMFORT was the glory of his Savior and the spread of God’s kingdom.

“For me to live is Christ – that Christ be exalted in my body.” JUST THINK of this motto and attitude applied in our personal lives. What’s AT THE HEART of **so many** of the problems in marriages and **families** – problems at work or **church** – problems in our own personal relationship with God? It’s the SELFISHNESS of our sinful natures – that ***“for me to live is ME”*** attitude. Instead of focusing on what’s BEST FOR OTHERS – for my spouse – children – parents, etc. – the sinful nature insists, “WHAT ABOUT ME!” Or there’s the “I’ve sacrificed enough already it’s ABOUT TIME I get my way.” **How** that POUTING – that selfishness and resentment – has CAUSED ALL KINDS of **problems** and **hurts** in our families and relationships. How is ANY of that ***“exalting Christ”***? How is ANY of that ***“for me to live is CHRIST”***? When you’re NOT SURE how to handle a situation or a person JUST STOP and ask, “Is this a way that ***‘exalts Christ’*** or is it ALL ABOUT ME?” An honest answer to that question WILL SHOW you the right way to go.

“I desire to depart and be with Christ – but it is more necessary for you that I remain.” Putting our **Christian motto** INTO PRACTICE calls for SELF-SACRIFICE – denying ourselves FOR THE GOOD of others. But isn’t that exactly what we SEE IN JESUS? Why did Jesus leave the glory of heaven and come live here in such humility? Why did Jesus go the way of the cross? To ***“exalt His heavenly Father”*** and to save us sinners from sin and hell.

“That Christ be exalted in my body. For to me to live is Christ and...”

II. ***“To die is gain.”***

“To die.” Today’s readings shove death into our face. So does life! **As Christians** we understand the REAL CAUSE of death. God’s **Word** is very clear and BLUNT. ***“The soul that sins, it shall die. The wages of sin is death.”*** God created us BODY and soul to live WITH Him and FOR Him and UNDER Him. **Sin** – and one of the Bible words for sin is ***“rebellion”*** – rejecting God’s authority over us – “NO, God, You can’t tell me how to live my life” – that sin has its consequences. Sin ruined God’s perfect creation. **Because of sin** we now have to deal with **sickness** and **suffering**, pain and problems. Because we ARE SINNERS we will one day die. Because we are sinners we really should end up in hell – forever separated from God – forever punished for our rebellion.

Because we ARE CHRISTIANS – because we have Jesus – we can stare our **open graves** in the eye and triumphantly say, ***“For me to die is GAIN.”*** Nobody can avoid death – **trusting in Jesus** as your Savior is the ONLY WAY anyone is really prepared to die. Go back to those BASIC TRUTHS of the gospel. Jesus is ***“our righteousness”*** – Jesus perfectly obeyed God’s law for us. Jesus is ***“the Lamb of God”*** who by His innocent sufferings and death on the cross has ***“taken away the sin of***

the world.” Jesus is ***“the Resurrection and the Life.”*** By HIS OWN triumphant resurrection from the dead Jesus has conquered death and hell for us. Our Lord who came out of His grave **alive** and **victorious** promises us, ***“Because I live, you shall live also.”***

Trusting in Jesus death has become a ***“gain”*** for us. ***“I desire to depart and BE WITH CHRIST, which is better by far.”*** When the Christian dies his soul goes **immediately** to be with Jesus in His heavenly glory. Jesus promised that repentant thief on the cross, ***“TODAY you will be WITH ME in Paradise.”*** In 2 Corinthians Paul explains the Christian’s death this way: ***“We would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.”*** Trusting in Jesus we now have heaven as our home – heaven where ***“there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain”*** – where God ***“will have wiped every tear from our eyes”*** – where we will join our Christian loved ones ***“around the throne of God and in front of the Lamb.”*** NOT ONLY that God also promises us that when Jesus returns in glory on the Last Day Jesus will raise our dead bodies back to life and then with a **glorified** body and soul we will live forever in that ***“new heaven and new earth, the home of righteousness.”*** How can you TOP that for a ***“gain”***? NO WONDER Paul ***“desired to depart and be with Christ.”*** NO WONDER Paul called that ***“far better”*** than sticking around for a **few more years** here on earth. With that to LOOK FORWARD to is it really any wonder that we now want to live so that ***“Christ is exalted in our bodies”***?

“To die is gain.” So death is FOR THE CHRISTIAN – no matter at WHAT AGE the Christian **dies and goes** to heaven. If the **Christian** has been years in a nursing home – suffering from all kinds of health problems – THEN we will easily call their death a ***“gain”*** – a **blessing**. But if the Christian dies as just a **baptized** BABY – as a teenager SO FULL of **life** and **dreams** – as a new husband or wife – a young father or mother – then IT’S TEMPTING to see their death as a **devastating** TRAGEDY – a real LOSS. Wait a minute! FOR US their death may be **such a loss**. But FOR THEM it was still a ***“gain”*** – far better than anything this life could still offer them. WE may have temporarily lost them in OUR LIVES – but they are not lost – they are with Jesus in heaven. We will mourn and miss them **in our lives** – but rejoice in the ***“gain”*** that IS THEIRS with Jesus in heaven.

“For me to live is Christ, to die is gain.” If our lives now are ***“Christ”*** – centered on and wrapped up in Christ – then ***“death is gain.”*** And the MORE I SEE my eternity sure in Christ – the more I’ll want to now ***“live Christ.”*** Then I’ll want to live our CHRISTIAN MOTTO – ***“that Christ be exalted in my body.”*** Amen.

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