

A Life Worth Living and a Death Worth Dying, Part 1

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[0 : 00] I invite you to stand for the reading of God's word.

! We'll be in the book of Philippians this morning as we continue.! Still in chapter 1, verses 18 through 26. We'll cover about half of that this morning, focusing on a life worth living.

And then next Sunday, we'll focus on a death worth dying. If you would grab your Bibles, and if you don't have a Bible, there's one in the pew that you can grab and turn into Philippians chapter 1, beginning in verse 18.

And then we'll go through verse 26. Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance.

As it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage, now as always, Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.

[1 : 11] For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me.

Yet which I shall choose, I cannot tell. I am hard-pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus because of my coming to you again.

May God add a blessing to the reading of his word. Would you please be seated? In 1993, while on a fishing trip in St. Mary's Glacier, Colorado, Bill Geraki got his leg pinned under a large boulder, and there was snow in the forecast, and he was with a jacket.

He was without adequate supplies for what he was about to endure. He didn't have any form of communication. There was no way out of this predicament, but he knew that he did not want to die.

[2 : 24] So in desperation, he used his flannel shirt as a tourniquet and then used his fishing knife to amputate his leg at the knee.

And then he used hemostats from his fishing kit to clamp the bleeding arteries, and then he crawled for half a mile to his truck where he got in and then drove another few miles to the hospital where he eventually ended up surviving.

Maybe if you have heard of the story of Aaron Ralston, who in 2003 had a similar experience. While hiking in Utah, a boulder fell, and it pinned him, pinned his arm against the rock, and after various attempts to try to free himself, spending six days trying to do that but being stuck there, he too amputated a limb, cutting off his arm with a dull multi-tool knife.

And then after that, he hiked another eight miles. He had to repel 60 feet to get down before he finally found a family who was able to take him to the hospital, and he too amazingly survived that encounter.

These stories teach us that human beings will do remarkable things in order to live.

[3 : 45] Human beings are willing to go to great lengths in order to preserve their lives and in order also to try and thwart death.

We spend all kinds of money on trying to find the best doctors to treat us or develop diets that will ensure that we are physically fit.

We will even, some people will move to different climates because they feel like it's better for their overall physical health. And even, as we've seen, some of us will cut off a part of our body if it means that we will survive.

Now again, I don't want you to think that I'm suggesting any of these things are wrong. In fact, I think it's good for us to take care of our bodies. But I'm simply stressing the fact that human beings have a great desire to live.

They have a great desire to live, and they will go to great lengths in order to preserve their lives. But here's the question I want to ask you.

[4 : 49] For what? Why? Why are we so desperate to live? Well, today's scripture confronts us with this question, and really, the question that we're going to see is this, or we're going to be presented with is this.

What are you living for? What are you living for? What's the purpose of your life? What's the meaning in your life? What's the mission of your life?

We understand that we are finite beings. Our time here on this planet is limited. And in fact, none of us is guaranteed tomorrow.

None of us is guaranteed tonight. In fact, there are some of us who are here this morning who won't be here next week because we're no longer among the living.

That's a sobering but true reality. I want you to look at me at a verse, James 4, 13 through 14.

James says to us, Now, come now, you who say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and try to make a profit.

[6 : 01] Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time, and then banishes.

And here I think James is describing a person who leaves God out of their plans. Or somebody who operates in life like a practical atheist. They're going to do their own thing and go their own way and they aren't going to consult with God about that at all as if God doesn't even exist.

Thinking that tomorrow is assured. But we understand that it isn't. I'll never forget an interview that I watched one Sunday morning on ESPN.

They used to do the Sunday morning conversation. I used to be able to watch that before my parents would drag me to church. And one of the people that they interviewed on this Sunday morning conversation was Al Davis. You guys remember Al Davis, the owner of the Oakland Raiders?

And being a Chiefs fan, you know, Al Davis was the enemy. So I had to know what Al Davis had to say. And they're interviewing Al Davis and he's made all this money being an owner of a professional football team.

[7 : 09] And then it comes to the very last question. And I'll never forget, the interviewer, and Al Davis was old at this time, asked him, what is the purpose of life?

And almost without a hesitation, Al Davis looked at that interviewer and said, well, isn't it obvious that the purpose of living is that he who dies with the most wins?

And unfortunately, many people think that that is what life is all about. But is life really about that? Is that what we're here to do?

Just try to gain as much as we can before it comes time for us to die? Because we know from Al Davis' experience and from others that you can't take any of that stuff with you.

The Bible has something much different to say about what our lives are about, about the meaning of our existence. Paul, who authored this letter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, is writing from a prison cell in Rome.

[8 : 15] He is a chained man. He's writing again, inspired by the Holy Spirit. And here we have words from God where we hear what it means to live. How we can live with purpose and how we can be glorified even in death.

The Apostle Paul tells us about a life that is worth living and about a death that is worth dying. In verse 21, For me to live is Christ, he says.

But dying is gain. This is one of the most quoted verses in the Bible, in the New Testament, and for good reason. Because it very clearly tells us that living in Christ is what life is all about.

That dying in Christ is what life should be all about. Living is about serving Christ, and dying is about being with Christ forever.

Now you might disagree with that. You might not think that that's what living is all about. You might think that that's not what dying is about either. You might believe it, but maybe you struggle with the thought that could you really find joy?

[9 : 33] I mean, I understand. I'm a Christian. I believe that that's what the Bible says, but can we really find joy like that in life? Because I feel like I can find it in other things. And we struggle with that.

But the application of this verse appears again in the beginning of verse 21. And Paul is saying, For me. For me, in that phrase. For me, living is Christ.

And so here's what I want to ask you this morning. How would you complete that sentence? For me, living is what? You fill in the blank.

I know how many people try to fill in that blank because I've tried to fill it in with many different things besides Christ in my life. And that's what we do as human beings. We try to find cheap substitutes.

We think, for me, living is this. And so we're in pursuit of that. And if ever you should achieve it, I think what you'll find, as I've found before, it wasn't enough. For me, living was that.

[10 : 36] But now that I have it, now I've got to find something else to live for. They're cheap substitutes for the fulfillment and the joy that only Christ can bring. So some people might fill in the blank in this way.

They might say, For me, living is money. That is life about. Kind of like Al Davis. For me, to live is to gain as much money as I can. Or they might fill in the blank this way.

For me, to live is pleasure. Or they might say, For me, to live is power. Or they might say, For me, to live is beauty. And especially in our culture, we might hear a lot of people say, For me, to live is to be entertained.

Now, they might not say that, but that's basically what it all funnels down to. What are you seeking and what you're looking for? Well, it's usually one of these categories. But I want you to see something.

When you use the logic of this passage, notice what fills in the second blank. Paul says, For me, to live is Christ. And thus, he can fill in the second blank by saying this.

[11 : 40] So, dying is gain. So, what if we apply that same logic to these other things that we've seen that many people are living for or filling that blank in with?

For example, money. If you say, For me, to live is making money. Or for me, to live is money. How would you then logically have to fill in that next blank? If you're living for money, then to die would be being broke, having nothing.

Or if you try to fill in that blank with power. For me, to live is gaining power. Then how would you have to fill in that second blank?

Dying means being powerless. What about beauty? If you say, For me, living is to be beautiful, then you would say dying means losing all beauty.

In fact, it means rotting. An unbeautiful thing. Here's the thing. I think many of us have the attitude of Al Davis.

[12 : 47] You know, it's just, for me, it's to get what I want. And to have what I want. But we've experienced and seen that in life, that one day, all of us who are living will one day die.

And all those possessions, and all those things that you treasure and cherish, will one day belong to somebody else. It will one day be somebody else's property.

And they're probably not going to care about it nearly as much as you did. That's just the truth. So how will you live the short life that you've been given?

And what will you die for? Money and power and beauty and pleasure and entertainment, they aren't sinful things in and of themselves.

Right? There's nothing wrong with these things. What's wrong with it is when we make these things idols. When we worship these things. When we try to live for these things that cannot because they just can't provide us with the kind of satisfaction and the purpose and the meaning that we all know that our lives must have.

[13 : 58] There's just something about human beings that we want to have meaning and purpose in our lives. And so we're trying to seek things to give our lives that meaning and purpose. But what we've seen is that those things we've observed probably in ourselves or in others that those things cannot give to us the kind of lasting satisfaction that we are all seeking and looking for.

And I don't know about you but I know for myself I don't want to waste my life. I don't want to waste my time.

I don't want to spend my days seeking things in this world that just don't matter. Things that just can't provide what I'm looking for.

Billions of years from now what will have mattered most about how you lived your life and I'm here to say that what will matter most is not how much money you made how great of relationships you had with other human beings what title you gained along the way what will matter most is who you said Jesus Christ was in this life.

And then how you lived your life either for Him or not for Him at all. See the thing about living for Christ is that it takes the sting out of death.

[15 : 30] And not only that but get this and this will sound weird and this will sound strange especially to our world. Not only does living for Christ take the sting out of death but it also makes death attractive.

That sounds weird doesn't it? And it is weird to the rest of the world to hear that but that's what the Bible says. That life or death excuse me is not something that we as Christians are seeking to avoid but it's something that we're looking forward to.

Now not that we have a martyr's complex or we're looking to end our lives ourselves but we understand that this world cannot give us ultimately what we're seeking and that it will only be in God's kingdom that we will find the completion the perfection the fulfillment that we're longing for and so we look forward to that day.

So again I want to ask you how do you fill in the blank? Over the course of my life I know that I have attempted again as I told you to fill that blank in with many different things.

And I have found that all of those things were lacking. And the only thing that has truly brought me consistent and lasting joy is knowing Jesus Christ.

[16 : 47] The Apostle Paul is telling the Philippians exactly that. He's telling them here about his present situation. The Philippians were concerned for Paul and in verses 12 through 26 Paul comforts the Philippians and he's essentially telling them not to worry about him not to worry about his sufferings that they will produce wonderful results.

And he's already told them some of the wonderful results that have happened is I'm in prison and guess what I have a captive audience. I have these prison guards. They're standing watch over me and I'm sharing the gospel with them and as a result of that the gospel is spreading from these prison guards to the rest of the imperial guard.

People are hearing the good news of Jesus Christ and so he's saying don't be cause for concern about me that I have a mission and a work to do but I trust and know that God has everything under his control and I'm not worried and I'm not afraid and neither should you be.

What does living the good life produce? Just a review we've gone over in Philippians we've talked about living the good life and we saw in the beginning that living the good life means living for Christ instead of yourself.

We also saw that living for God is or living for the good life excuse me is experienced by living in community with other believers. In the past couple weeks we've seen that living the good life means focusing on the gospel and that living the good life means that you are more concerned about Christ's glory than your own and so now today we see again that the good life is experienced by living for Christ.

[18 : 18] In verses 18 through 21 again Paul says yes and I will rejoice for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Christ the Holy Spirit this will turn out for my deliverance as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed but that with full courage now as always God will be honored in my body whether by life or by death for me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

And so here we'll see that the apostle tells us what living this good life produces and first he says there in verse 18 that living for Christ produces joy.

Again I've told you and explained the circumstances surrounding his arrest and where he is in prison and he is saying yes and I will rejoice. Living for Christ produces joy even in the midst of uncertainty.

Paul had concluded the previous verse by saying I rejoice and now he turns his focus to the future saying I will rejoice. The results of Paul's imprisonment were unknown to him.

He didn't know yet what was going to happen but he still expressed assurance for his future that no matter what happened he will rejoice.

[19 : 40] Paul didn't know what his imprisonment would end up with but he understood because he had Christ because he knew God he had reason to be joyful.

A lot of Christians have this picture I think of God up in heaven and I'm not a big Star Trek fan but my dad was and I was you know unfortunately had to watch a lot of Star Trek episodes with him as a father as punishment I think now for those of you who love it God bless you okay God made us all differently and you're different but that's good but I think you know you remember Captain Kirk whenever something would go wrong and there would be some kind of crisis and so you know Captain Kirk would jump into the captain's seat and everybody else would go to their stations and he would be barking out orders do this, do that, do this, do that what is this, what is that and so I think a lot of people have this view of God being the same way you know the things happen in this world and God's unprepared for it oh no you know Steve married Katie he was supposed to marry Susie now we've got to we've got to get Katie out of the picture somehow or else he's not going to go to Africa and be a missionary this is a crazy this is chaotic and so God's in the captain's seat commanding his angels and barking out order do this, do that, do this, do that so we've got to get the plan back on track

God doesn't operate like that it's not like that for God because God is sovereign what does that mean that God is sovereign and how can the fact that we understand when we understand that God is sovereign how can that bring us joy well the sovereignty of God refers to the fact that God is in complete control of the universe God is in complete control of the universe now understand this is not fatalism fatalism is the belief that our decisions and choices make no real difference because we will they will turn out how they've been previously ordained this is not fatalism fatalism is in contrast actually to what the Bible says and what the Bible teaches that people make real choices and their real choices have real consequences and real consequences for which they will one day be held accountable for

God allows all that happens to happen and ultimately God's will is accomplished by all that has happened and all that will happen make sense?

okay you might think that you might think that this topic would be better suited for maybe a theology class but it's important that we understand the sovereignty of God in a practical way because it's significant to our everyday lives it'll make a huge difference for you if you understand this because the sovereignty of God does impact our everyday life and he does so in ways that will help us to not worry like we normally would now we still worry but it's not a result because God somehow lacks ability but when we worry it's because we are not trusting in God's sovereignty and we have a situation that's outside of our control and so we worry because we think it gives us some kind of power over it when it doesn't it just makes us miserable and so when we understand that God is completely in control it helps to take worry away we can trust what the Bible claims about God's character that it's backed up by God's ability not only does God love us but loves us but he's able to also care for us like he's promised and that those who belong to God have this promise from Romans 8:28 it says and we know that for those who love God all things work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose you see we can rest assured and even experience joy in the fact that we know that God is able to work all things for our good even when we fail or struggle to perceive it in that way that as a Christian when you became a follower of Christ however you perceived your good times your mountaintop moments or your valley moments that God is using every single one of those moments to make you more like his son and prepare you ultimately for his kingdom that is to come now this sermon if this sermon was about the sovereignty of God then I would bring up again countless examples of how I've experienced that truth how we see that truth experienced in the Bible how can God use suffering to produce good well let's look at [24 : 19] Jesus Christ who was crucified for our sins and you think how can such a terrible thing such as that be good for anybody but yet we see it was because of the crucifixion of Christ that we are able to be forgiven of our sins and be able to be cleared righteous by God it's a great thing the sovereignty of God impacts our everyday life in that we can trust God's sanctifying work in us oftentimes as Christians we feel that God saves us and then he kind of leaves us leaves it up to us to do the rest right okay I've saved you you're mine now good luck but the Bible says it doesn't work that way that each of us has been given a role to play that it's up to us to live our lives obediently to Christ for sure and we all have been given a role to play but we can also trust that God is sovereign and he is working in us to make us like his son

Jesus Christ he's given us a new nature and he will bring that to perfection Philippians 1:6 we weren't there that long ago and I am sure of this that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ that should give us joy great joy I know it does for me because I think you know what if I could I would really mess up this salvation thing and in fact I think a lot of times that I have but God says to me and he gives us that assurance in his sovereignty that you know what you're a work in progress but one day that work will be completed and I'm going to make sure that it happens let's look at Romans 8:29 through 34 for those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son in order that he might be the firstborn among brothers and those whom he predestined he also called and those whom he called he also justified and those whom he justified he also glorified what then shall we say of these things if God is for us who can be against us he did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all how will he not also with him graciously give us all things who shall bring a charge against God's elect it is God who justifies who is to condemn

Christ Jesus is the one who died more than that who was raised who is at the right hand of God who intercedes for us so our salvation has been God's sovereign plan from all eternity rather than focus on our performance in difficult circumstances we can rest assured and trust in the character of God we can trust in his ability and through his promises believe that what he has told us and promises he has the ability to fulfill and I find great joy in that and I hope that you do too you know what else I find great joy in it says there again that Christ has been raised and he is interceding on our behalf in heaven you know what blows my mind is to think that as Christ has interceded for me my name has been on his lips and he has spoken my name to our heavenly father and if you're a child for God that is the same for you your name has been on Christ's lips he has spoken your name to the father in interceding for you

I find great joy in that and my mind is blown by that you know how good and loving of a creator and savior we have we don't again worship a God who doesn't know us we don't worship a God who doesn't care about us we worship a God who knit us together in our mother's wombs we know a God who died for us that we might have life we know a God who gives our lives meaning and purpose we know a God who has a place for us forever in his kingdom in heaven and you understand this right now that somewhere in heaven as a believer there is a dwelling place with your name written atop of it and it may not do that but it's your place and it's waiting for you I find great joy in that that I'm not going to die and go to heaven and there whoa what's your name again okay I think we got an opening you know back down this hallway no they're going to be prepared for that because God is sovereign here's your place it's been prepared for you you're not a stranger here this is awesome news and if you know

Christ as your Lord and Savior then you know that this is true for you as well and you know what all of this does what it's done for me is it's made me better identify the things in life that don't matter and it makes me care less for those things and at the same time it's enabled me to identify things in life that do matter and care a lot more for them than I did before and as we've seen in scripture that God's people have passed this legacy on to us the prophet Habakkuk demonstrated his steadfast commitment to rejoice in the Lord despite the fact that there was no food that the fields were empty yet he would continue to rejoice in the Lord Job could also say though he was enduring all that he endured praise the name of Yahweh again despite the fact that he lost everything Paul understood the uncertainty of his circumstances as well but he did not fear because he had a greater understanding of God his sovereignty and that gave him certainty and that produced joy that produced joy within him

[30:27] I didn't plan to share this illustration but I was reading last night in a book it's called The Imperfect Disciple by Jared C. Wilson and I recommend if you like to read to grab that book and he told a story about when he was a pastor in Vermont and he had a very good friend who was diagnosed with an incurable form of cancer and he was only 32 years old and as he was his friend was in with the doctor and he was hearing this news and they knew it was probably not going to be good his father was there and when the doctor told him his father started to break down you know and said to him no father should ever have to bury his own son and Jared Wilson's friend who had been diagnosed with cancer he said dad God will use this and he wore this wristband as he went through all of his cancer treatments that said God God's got this and Jared Wilson talks about how he would see his friend slowly deteriorating before his own eyes in this wristband that was once tight on his wrist the last time he saw him was just dangling and barely not slipping off of his hand and as he saw his friend dying

God spoke to him through that little wristband and he realized that you know what God does have this and that this that God has is my friend and my friend will one day be and soon be with the Lord forever God indeed has us no matter what we're going through the prospects of Paul's trial drove him to prayer but it did not drive him to despair so I want to ask you what are your trials this morning what are the obstacles that you are facing and how are you facing those obstacles are you praying about it or are you pouting about it are you praising or are you protesting living for Christ produces joy and if you're lacking joy in your life then it is probably probably because you've lost focus of Christ and you've lost faith in his ability and you've been trusting in your own and your ability will always fail you but God's never will living for Christ also produces confidence verses 19 through 21 it produces joy it produces confidence for I know that through your prayers and the help of the spirit of Jesus Christ that this will turn out for my deliverance as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed but that with full courage now and always

Christ will be honored in my body whether by life or death for me to live as Christ and to die is gain now here Paul is actually quoting from Job in the Greek the Septuagint which is the Old Testament written in Greek this is an exact quote where he says this will turn out for my deliverance it's when Job was telling his friends that this will also be for my salvation and so here we see that Paul is reflecting on scripture and I don't want to get there too fast but there are two applications for this of what's happening here how are we able to have confidence produced in us well the first is that confidence is produced by prayer by prayer first note the relationship between prayers and God's provision of the Spirit again in Romans 8 26 through 27 the Spirit helps us in our weaknesses for we do not know what to pray for as we ought but the Spirit himself entered seeds for us with groanings too deep for words and he who searches hearts knows what's in the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God and so have you ever prayed in such a way where you just didn't have the words to say you know I've done that where you just you kind of hit your knees and you wow you exhale deep sigh

God I don't even know where to begin and in those moments we have the Holy Spirit of God interceding for us through our groans that are too great for our words and so I don't want you to think this that your prayers always matter prayer matters God uses prayers and often he uses our prayers for others to produce confidence within them and within us have you ever experienced that when you pray you just feel confident afterwards I know whenever I have had a real serious dilemma there's an issue and I'm just seeking some guidance and I need some help what I'll do is I'll call my dad I'll call my dad because my dad's a godly man and he's very wise and I know that he cares about me so he's gonna care about the dilemma that I have and when I talk to him and I share the dilemma he usually he gives me advice and he's great about it he's like well this is what I would do and you know what when I get off the phone you know what I do

I feel courageous I feel confident to encounter that situation that I'm encountering but you know what I still have to go through it I still have to follow the advice and it's the same thing for us when prayer you know God will give us that courage and that confidence but it's still up to us to carry through with what he has put on our heart to do prayer works in the same way Philippians 4 6-7 do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus so we see the good news here is that when we pray and we go to God he wants to hear what we have to say he wants to hear our pouting pout when you pray that's fine God's not going to be caught off guard by that but pray and the promise that we have is when we do that God has a way of helping us to feel secure even in the midst of our uncertain times and it produces confidence confidence is also produced by reflection on scripture again notice

[36 : 32] Paul's reflection is on God's word he is recalling and meditating upon Job and he is remembering what Job has gone through and he remembers the outcome of all that Job went through and he realizes and he's confident and he's assured based on scripture that what he's going through will turn out for his deliverance either he will live and continue to live and that will be for Christ and fruitful work or he will die and he will be with the Lord forever the gospel the good life is experienced by living for Christ and next week we'll see how the good life is experienced in dying for Christ but again everybody wants to live and everyone will die but there's one way to have life worth living and there's one way to have a death worth dying and that is to look to the one who conquered death the one Paul describes and desired to see above all other things

Jesus Christ this is the good news this is the gospel if you don't think that your life has meaning if you don't have this outlook on death the Bible tells us that grace is available to us to you in the person of Jesus Christ who came to us as Philippians chapter 2 says and humbled himself dying the death that we deserved paying the penalty for our sins that we might have eternal life and then he rose again on the third day on our behalf and now he's reigning there waiting for the Lord to send him back he says there is a righteousness that depends on faith and not works and Jesus declares to you that it's his righteousness and he declares to you to turn away from your own efforts to turn away from the things that you are seeking to give your life meaning and purpose and to look to him and with the promise that you will find all that you've been looking for but it's only in him but it's only in him but it's only in him but it's only in him but it's only in him but it's only in him but it's only in him but it's only in him but it's only in him but it's only in him but it's only in him but it's only in him but it's only in him but it's only in him but it's only in him but it's only in him but it's only in him but it's only in him!

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