

# Philippians 1:21

*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: 14 April 2013

Preacher: Basil Howlett

[ 0 : 0 0 ] I was very gently rebuked this morning because I didn't tell you the end of the story of Brother Benedict, the monk who came to church one Sunday.

Well, the story was that, praise God, he was converted and he came to know the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour. Then, of course, some ardent Christians wanted him out of the monastery the next day, but we had to explain to them that the monastery had been in his life, his work, his home, everything for the past 25 years.

So for a little while he stayed in the monastery, but while he was in the monastery he kept taking books from the church bookstall and putting them in the monastery library. So I was able to write to Dr. Lloyd-Jones just before he died to say, Doctor, you'll be glad to know that a copy of your book, Atonement and Justification, is now in the library of the monastery at Prinnish Happy.

But he eventually left the monastery and was baptized and he's now in glory. A wonderful trophy of God's grace.

Now, Philippians chapter 1. Philippians chapter 1. Paul is writing there and he says, verse 21, For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

[ 1 : 1 9 ] For me to live is Christ and to die is gain. None of us knows what the next 12 months will bring.

All we know with absolute certainty is that one of two things will happen. We'll either go on living or we'll die.

We can be certain of one or the other of those things. And if we're Christians, we should be able to face both of those eventualities with calmness.

Life or death. When Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians, he was in prison in Rome because he was a preacher of the gospel.

And his future was very uncertain. He didn't know what would happen. All he knew was that in the coming months, he would either continue to live or else he would die.

[ 2 : 1 8 ] Sometimes it seemed possible, just possible, that he might be set free and allowed to continue his work as a gospel preacher. At other times, it seemed more likely that he would be put to death.

He really was hovering between these two options, life and death. And he says, I don't really care which it is.

In many ways, I want to continue to live because there is so much work to be done for the Lord. And I want to help you Philippian believers. But in the final issue, I don't really mind whether I live or die.

And then he tells us why he doesn't mind whether he lives or dies. Verse 31. For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Now that was Paul's personal motto for life. For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. He says in effect, if I'm allowed to go on living, that'll be fine.

[ 3 : 25 ] Because for me to live is Christ. If I'm put to death, that'll be fine too. Because for me to die is gain. So here, in this 21st verse, we have Paul's aim in life and his assurance in death.

His aim in life and his assurance in death. First, his aim in life. It was to live for the Lord Jesus Christ. Some people live for money.

Their great, aiming life is to get as much money as they possibly can. As quickly as they can. Money? Their eyes light up at the very mention of it.

One of the saddest things I ever heard of was of a couple, a mother and a father, who palmed off their children to a childminder.

And both went to work on Christmas day because there was extra money for working on Christmas day. As though earning money could be more important than spending Christmas day with their own children.

[ 4 : 34 ] Some people live for money. Others live for possessions. It's their little God. I've never forgotten something I saw when I was a boy at school.

On wet days, during the school holidays, the children on the road where I lived used to go to each other's houses to play Monopoly and games like that.

There was one poor girl. We were never invited to her house. I'm not talking now about Margaret. She lived up the road, but she wasn't in our gang at that time. So I'm not talking about her.

This poor girl, we were never allowed to go to her house. Her mother was too house proud to let us into the house. But the girl pleaded with her mother, Please let my friends come round and play games this wet day.

I often go to their houses. Please let them come to my house. And we went. I've never forgotten it. Mother had tied newspapers and old bits of cloth around the table legs and around the chair legs in case we damaged them in any way.

[ 5 : 42 ] She'd spread an old sheet all across the floor in case we saw the floor in any way. And I thought, this is amazing. Now we're not talking about a luxury penthouse.

We're talking about a back-to-back terrace house in a poor district of Norwich. But she was house proud, you see. She was living for her possessions. Some live for sport.

We've seen that, haven't we? During the Olympic last year. The God of sport is nothing new. Before I became a Christian, I was mad keen on motorcycle racing and speedway.

It was my life. There was a rumor that Norwich Speedway track was going to close. And I thought that the end of my world had come. People live for sport.

But Paul lived for the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ was more important to him than anything else or anyone else.

[ 6 : 42 ] And that's how it should be with us. I wonder whether it is for me to live is Christ. Let me spell out what that means.

For the start, the person who lives for Christ will be anxious to hear and read and learn as much as possible about him.

If football is the great passion of a man's life, the first thing he does when he picks up the newspaper is to turn to the sports pages and read all about football on Saturday.

Every Saturday afternoon, without fail, because football is his life, he will turn on the TV to listen to the results. And woe betide anybody who makes any noise whilst the results are being read out.

He tries to grasp all he can about the sport which he loves. It fascinates him and grips him.

[ 7 : 46 ]     He cannot read enough about it. He can't hear enough about it. Well, if we live for the Lord Jesus Christ, we will be eager to read and hear and learn all we can about the Lord and his ways.

Sadly, some Christians who claim to be living for Christ make any excuse not to hear his word, not to read his word.

Secondly, to live for Christ means that Paul was anxious, was anxious to please him. When you love someone and live for them, you are most anxious to please them.

It was a standing joke with my brothers that when Margaret and I started going out together, I went with her to the ballet. I gave up my motorbikes and went with her to the ballet.

And my brothers never forgave me for that. But what you'll do for someone you love, you'll do anything. You're eager to please them because you love them.

[ 8 : 59 ]     And if we live for the Lord Jesus Christ, if we love him, we'll do all we can to please him. Or to put that the other way around, we will be anxious to avoid anything which will offend him in any way.

It's like that on the human level, isn't it? Because you love someone, a wife, husband, mother, father, a friend, because they mean so much to you, the last thing you want to do is to hurt them or grieve them in any way.

And so it should be with the Lord Jesus Christ. Because we love him, our daily desire should be to avoid anything which displeases him.

Our great desire should be to love him more and to serve him better. Then, thirdly, to live for Christ means that we'll be willing to make sacrifices for him.

If we really love someone, if they really mean something to us, then we make every sacrifice for them. Nothing is too much trouble.

[ 10 : 06 ]     And if we really love the Lord Jesus Christ and live for him, we'll be willing to make any sacrifice for him. People do it for worldly interests.

Look at those men who live for their football. What sacrifices they're willing to make. What discomforts and hardships and inconveniences they're willing to endure.

They're standing, queuing for hours to get a ticket for the big match. They're ready to face any hardship for the sake of football.

And as believers, if we live for the Lord Jesus Christ, we should be willing to endure any hardship, any sacrifice for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Listen to Paul giving his testimony in chapter 3 of this epistle to the Philippians. Paul says this, Whatever was to my profit, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

[ 11 : 11 ]     What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I've lost all things, and count them as rubbish that I may gain Christ and be found in him.

Paul is saying there that because I love for the Lord Jesus Christ and because I live for him, I've been prepared to lose everything. And I count that as rubbish in order that I might serve him.

Being prepared to make any sacrifice, for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. It also means being prepared to work for him. That was certainly the case with the Apostle Paul. He says in verse 22, that if he does live, that will mean more fruitful labor on his part.

And he's pleased about that. It will mean more fruitful labor. Paul doesn't say, I'm getting old now, so I better ease off a bit.

He says, no, if I go on living, that will mean more fruitful labor for the Lord Jesus Christ. He counted it a great privilege to work for the Lord Jesus Christ and so should we.

[ 12 : 32 ] Now I know that some of us are getting to the stage where we find ourselves slowing down a bit. We can't do as much as we once did. And we may find that hard to cope with.

But there's always something to do for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. There's always something to do for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have an elderly lady in our church.

She's quite frail and blind. But she has a wonderful piece of Christian service. When I used to go visiting as a pastor, I would go to people who were ill and someone would beat me to it.

This dear lady, blind lady, used to write cards in a scroll and send them to people who were ill. I guess her card always arrived on that doorstep before I did.

If anyone was facing an operation, if anyone was facing some difficulty in their life, they had a card from her. Blind, elderly, but still serving the Lord.

[ 13 : 43 ] I want to go on living, says Paul. That will mean more fruitful labor for the Lord. Then, of course, if we live for the Lord Jesus Christ, we should be ready to speak about him, to spread his wonderful gospel.

The man who lives for his football, have you noticed? is always talking about football. When I lived for Speedway Motorcycle Racing, I was always talking about that. If you live for something, you're talking about it.

And if you live for the Lord Jesus Christ, you'll be always talking about him and anxious to spread the good news about him. Then lastly, but by no means least, to live for Christ means that the greatest longing of our lives is to know him better.

You remember how Paul puts it in the third chapter of this letter? He says, Oh, that I might know him. Now, Paul is writing to the Christian there.

He may deal with this next week, but Paul was writing to the Christian there. But he says, My greatest desire as a Christian is to know Christ better. That's my longing.

[ 14 : 55 ] Some years ago, I was traveling from Newcastle to Bristol on the train, and Ian Botham, who was the famous cricketer at that time, got on the train and came and sat in the carriage where I was.

Well, various people had noticed that he got on the train. And so children and young people and adults too kept coming through the carriage to have a look at this man and to speak with him and to get his autograph and have a chat with him.

And he was happy to do that. Now, if we live for the Lord Jesus Christ, we'll be eager to get to know more about him.

Then, can I say this about living for the Lord Jesus Christ? Why should we live for the Lord Jesus Christ?

The answers are so obvious. Why should we live for him? Because of who he is. He's the Lord of glory. He's the eternal and everlasting Son of God. He's the greatest person in the whole universe.

[ 16 : 04 ] He's the Lord. Look at chapter 2, verse 6 of this letter, where Paul says, who, being in very nature of God, he did not consider equality with God something to be grasped.

He made himself nothing, taken in the nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross.

Wherefore, therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name, which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. That's the first reason why we should live for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because of who he is. He's the eternal Son of God. Lord. And he's now the King of kings and Lord of lords.

[ 17 : 04 ] He's the one before whom one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that he is Lord. Secondly, why should we live for the Lord Jesus Christ?

Because of what he's done for us. He has saved us. Although he was the Son of God, he humbled himself and came into this world and was obedient unto death, even death upon a cross.

Why? In order to save us from our sin. In order to rescue us. In order to put us on the road to heaven. That's why we live for him.

Or should do. Because of what he's done for us. And here's another reason why we should live for the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the most wonderful, glorious life imaginable.

To live for money, that brings disappointment and worry and anxiety. Especially when the interest rates are at rock bottom.

[ 18 : 13 ] To live for pleasures and possessions, they never satisfy. And when someone wrecks your car, that's not very happy, is it?

But to live for Christ is glorious and wonderful. The more we live for him, the more we will know about him, and the more we will enjoy his presence, and the more peace and joy we will have.

I'm not saying that if we live for Christ, we'll have a trouble-free life. Obviously not. Paul lived for the Lord Jesus Christ, but he was in prison.

What I am saying is that if we live for the Lord Jesus Christ, then we will find that to be the most enjoyable, the most satisfying life imaginable, to live for our Savior.

One song that we used to sing when new songs first came out had the words, there is no joy nor thrill. There is no peace nor thrill like walking in his will.

[ 19 : 21 ] And if we live for the Lord Jesus Christ, that will be bliss indeed. So Paul says, if I'm released from prison, that's okay by me.

I'll go on living for Christ. I'll be glad about that. But then, having seen his aim in life, we must now go on to see his assurance in death.

For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. It says, Paul, it may not be the Lord's will for me to be released from prison.

It may be his will for me to be put to death. And if that happens, that's okay. Because for me, death will be gain.

I won't be alarmed. And in the same way, Christian friends, we need not fear death. We may be apprehensive apprehensive about the process of dying, whether there will be pain and suffering and weakness.

[ 20 : 24 ] And of course, we'll be apprehensive about us dying, what effect that will have upon our loved ones, of course. We're apprehensive about the process of dying, but there's nothing to be feared about death itself.

Because if we're Christians, that will be gain for us. We'll be better off when we die. Now, some people say that in a fit of pique.

They're going through a bad time. And they say rather ill-temperately, I'd be better off dead. Sadly for many, that will not be true.

If they've lived a life ignoring the Lord Jesus Christ, they won't be better off dead. They'll have to face an awful eternity far away from God.

But for the Christian, it is true to say that. We'll be better off dead. We don't say that miserably. It's absolutely true. We'll be better off when we die.

[ 21 : 32 ] Don't misunderstand me. Life for the Christian is wonderful. Life for the Christian is a life of peace, a life of joy, a life of thrill, a life of serving the Lord Jesus Christ.

That is wonderful. But when we die, that will be better for us. In what way will we be better off? In what way will it be gain for us as Christians to die?

Well, the moment we die as Christians, the moment we take our last breath, we go on to spend eternity in heaven. There's no such place as purgatory.

No such place. The moment the Christian dies, the moment he breathes his last or her last, their essential being goes on to a far better life in the presence of Almighty God in a far better place.

our bodies will be laid to rest in the grave. Our souls will go on immediately to be with the Lord.

[ 22 : 39 ] And Paul says in verse 23, I'm torn between two things. I want to go on living in this world serving the Lord down here, helping you people at Philippi, but I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ which is better by far.

death for the Christian is the doorway to a far better life in heaven. Let me tell you more about it. It will be a life free from all sickness.

No more pain or disease or weakness. No more arthritis. No more sciatica.

No more headaches. A life free from all sickness and pain and disease and weakness. It will be a life free from all sorrow.

No more crying. Every tear will be wiped away. There will be nothing but unspeakable joy and rejoicing in the presence of God.

[ 23 : 49 ] It will be a life free from all sin. even the best Christian in this world is a poor sinner still. Even the best Christian is just a poor sinner saved by grace.

But when we die and go on to be with the Lord we'll become perfect and all sin will be eradicated from our lives.

Isaac once wrote those beautiful words about heaven. Sin my worst enemy before shall vex my eyes and ears no more.

Never again will you see anything sinful. Never again will you hear anything sinful. Never again will you do anything sinful. All that will be eradicated. it will be a life of perfect sight.

We will see and grasp all these great truths of scripture as never before. Our knowledge now is very limited isn't it?

[ 25 : 02 ] Very small. There are many profound doctrines of scripture that we haven't fully grasped. I once said that in a sermon and a young fellow afterwards said I don't think I'm coming to this church anymore I want a minister who knows all about these things.

I'm sorry to disappoint you there is no man on earth who understands all the truths of scripture in a perfect way. Our knowledge now is very limited very small.

There are many profound truths of scripture that we haven't fully grasped yet. In our pride we think we may have grasped them but in fact we're still like little children paddling in the edges of the Pacific Ocean and there are vast depths out there that we haven't plumbed yet.

But when we get to heaven we will see and understand all these truths with absolute clarity. Yes in all the great mysteries of life when we get to heaven will be explained perhaps something has happened in your life which you cannot understand.

Why was that loved one taken away at such a young age? Why was that loved one taken away suddenly when so full of promise?

[ 26 : 30 ] Why was that child snatched away? why did our first granddaughter die soon after birth?

Why? Why? There are great mysteries aren't there in life? Great mysteries. We don't understand why God allowed that to happen.

But when we get to heaven when we die and go into heaven all these great mysteries will be made plain to us. now we see through a glass darkly but then face to face.

Now I know in part but then I shall know fully even as I am fully known. So it will be a life of perfect sight.

Everything is clear. It will be a life of perfect service and worship. Here on earth we try to worship and serve the Lord but often our service is very poor.

[ 27 : 31 ] Sin gets in the way and mars it. But beyond death our service for the Lord will be perfect, unblemished.

Again quoting Isaac Watts, then shall I see and hear and know all I desired or wish below and every power finds sweet employ in that eternal world of joy.

A life without suffering, a life without sin, a life without sorrow, a life with perfect sight, a life with perfect service but most of all above all it will be a life with the Savior.

That's the chief thing about death as far as the Christian is concerned. It is the gateway to life with the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what Paul says in verse 23, I desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is better by far.

The moment Christians die, their souls, their essential beings pass into the very presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 28 : 55 ] Here on earth we know something of his presence and that is wonderful. When we meet together on the Lord's day and sing these great songs of worship, we know something of the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we're quiet at home, we know something of the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ and that is wonderful. But when we get to heaven, when we die, we should know the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ perfectly.

We'll actually be in his presence forever and ever. The king there in his beauty without a veil is seen.

It were a well spent journey, those seven deaths lay between. The lamb with his fair army doth on Mount Zion stand, and glory, glory dwelleth in Emmanuel's land.

Death for Paul, death for every Christian, is glorious gain. Paul's aim in life, his assurance of death.

[ 30 : 11 ] Can you ask my friend, have you got an aim in life? Have you got an aim in life? life? Is your aim in life to live for the Lord Jesus Christ? Is he everything to you?

Is he your Lord and your saviour and your king and your brother and your friend? To quote the Song of Solomon, is he the chief among ten thousand as far as you are concerned?

Have you got an aim in life? If it's living for money or living for possessions or living for pleasure, all of that will come to an end soon. But if living for Christ is your aim, that's wonderful.

Have you got an assurance in death? None of us knows when we'll be called away. None of us knows whether we'll see tomorrow.

That's not being morbid, that's being realistic. Sometimes Christian preachers accused of being out of touch with reality, but there's nothing more real than that. All of us are going to die one day.

[ 31 : 20 ] That's not pessimistic, that is realistic. Have you got an assurance in the face of death that you go on to be with Christ, which is better by far?

Now says Paul at the end of verse 22 and in verses 23 and 24, I've got a problem. I don't know which to choose. I'm torn between the two things.

I have a desire to depart this life and to be with Christ in heaven that will be better by far for me. Nevertheless, to remain here in the body, here on earth, is more necessary for you Philippian believers.

You're still a young church, you need a lot of help, a lot of counsel and teaching. I'm torn between these two things. I've got a desire to depart with Christ and go to heaven, yet I want to stay here and do the Lord's work and help you.

Paul was torn between two things. And I would like to suggest to you that the spiritually healthy Christian should always be in that position of tension, torn between two possibilities, in many ways desiring to leave and go to heaven to be with Christ and to serve him without any limitation or to stay here on earth and to continue to serve the Lord because there are so many, many people in this world who still need to hear about him.

[ 33 : 03 ] and there's still so many young Christians in this world who still need to be strengthened in their knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. So I'm suggesting that the healthy Christian should always be in this state of tension, having a desire to depart.

But I want to stay here as well to continue to serve the Lord in this world. Sadly, many of us are not torn between those two things.

We're just desperate to stay down here as long as we can to live for our worldly pleasures and to live for our worldly pursuits.

That's sad, isn't it? The healthy position is to be in the position of the Apostle Paul, having a desire to depart, but eager to stay down here to serve the Lord.

But that's Paul's aim in life, to live for Christ, his assurance in death. It will be far better for me when I arrive there in the glory. Now let's sing a hymn which talks about our Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 34 : 21 ] we ended this morning with the song. We ended this morning with