

## **BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH - PHILIPPIANS 1: 21 - 26.**

*...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.*

Death is not a very popular topic for discussion. Especially amongst white people. Funerals are not very popular with us either. I don't know many white people who like to attend them. I suppose that they are not popular, because we do not want to be reminded of our mortality. That's probably one of the reasons we do not like to talk about death. 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 made 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.

It is understandable that you would view death as an enemy if you think death ends your existence. 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 before us. He talks about how he is in a personal conflict. 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?

In order 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 final. It is not the end. While our bodies might die, our spirits live on. Death is the transferral of life from one form of existence to another.

God has created the human spirit to be eternal. What we call death is not ultimate death. It is merely the death of our physical bodies. The human body is not immortal, so it dies. When it does, the spiritual part of us steps into eternity. Of course, the question then becomes one of our final destination. What kind of eternity are we stepping into? Is it heaven or hell? 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?

The Bible teaches that those who know Christ as Saviour will go to heaven, while those who do not know Christ as Saviour and Lord, will go to hell.

God has taken incredible measures to see that we do not go to hell. 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 give our lives to Jesus. If anyone goes to hell, it will be because he refused to come to Jesus, to follow him and love him.

Christians will go to heaven. We will be more alive than we have ever been. Death brings us into the presence of Christ. The Bible teaches that the moment we close our 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 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 do those words mean to us? What, in heaven, can we gain by dying?

***We gain a better body.*** It will be 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 when we die, 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 every one of us according to whom we are and what we did in his kingdom!

***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 saints 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!

You see, 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!**

Are you ready to die? If you are, then you 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 may be called 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 all gratefulness and love for him. This was Paul's desire. Paul's desire was to glorify God whether in life or in death. Indeed, that is the highest calling for any Christian. In all things our lives should glorify God.

This is not just in the "church" things we do. This is for everything. This doesn't mean that we are to glorify God only 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, and 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 need to remember, as Paul did, that we are here for others. This knowledge was what caused the Apostle his dilemma. While he 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 more than simply trying to please himself. He was here for others. That is why Christ came and Paul was just following the example of his Lord.  
We are here for others. 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 how to be reconciled with God, to the extent that to die, is to gain eternal joy and life!

**Appeal:**

True life is helping people to see that God found them.

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 live.**

*In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit!*

*Amen.*

*To give feedback or ask questions about this sermon outline, you are welcome to email the Rev. Andries Combrink, Minister of Centurion West Presby, at [info@cpk.co.za](mailto:info@cpk.co.za)*