



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

A Matter of Life and Death in the Capitol

PHILIPPIANS 1:21

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For several years there has been a popular slogan emblazoned on bumper stickers and t-shirts, “_____ is life, the rest is just details”. The blank is filled in with whatever the owner considers an important part of their lives, perhaps some cause, sport, hobby. While the motto certainly is a bit tongue in cheek, it does point to the fact that for each of us, there is an overriding set of values and priorities that define and direct our lives. What is most important to us? What do we think about the most? On what basis do we set goals and make decisions? “My vocation and career is life...” “Family is life...” “Success and recognition is life...” There are many ways we might answer the question of what is most important in life. For you, working in the capitol and in the world of politics, how would you fill in the blank?

In the verse which is the focus of this week’s study, Paul gives us his own “motto” which defines what is most important in his life:

*For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.
Philippians 1:21*

In this amazing statement, we see that being a follower of Jesus Christ, living as a citizen of heaven, is indeed a matter of life and death. The supremacy of Christ is what filled and dominated Paul’s life. The desire to be with Christ gave him comfort and encouragement to face and even relish his own death. In a world like that of the statehouse and politics which can easily consume our values and priorities, it will be helpful to concentrate on this verse that reminds us that each of us faces a matter of life and death in the capitol.

We find this statement in the middle of a passage where Paul is encouraging the Philippian believers as they are concerned about his difficult and dangerous situation. A prisoner of the Roman Empire, Paul has appealed his case to Caesar. He is now detained in Rome, constantly chained to an imperial guard, awaiting the disposition of his case. He could be released, or he could be executed based simply upon the whim of the emperor. This is what he writes:

²⁰...According to my earnest expectation and hope, that I

will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²²But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. ²³But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; ²⁴yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.

We find in this passage how Paul is conflicted in his desires. He wants to go on living so that he can spread the good news of Christ and serve the believers in Philippi and elsewhere. Yet he desires to be with Christ in heaven, which will only be possible upon his death. Paul gives us a glimpse of his inner most thoughts and struggles as he shares “I am hard-pressed from both directions”. In his words we see that living the Christian life and conducting ourselves in a manner worthy of our citizenship in heaven is a matter of life and death.

A MATTER OF LIFE: “TO LIVE IS CHRIST...”

Every one of us should think seriously about how we would complete the statement, “To me to live is _____”. In a wonderful sermon on this passage, Charles H. Spurgeon described it this way:

“Imagine you see Paul landing upon the shores of Philippi. There by the riverside are crowds gathered, going about their business. The merchant busy with his ledger might say, ‘to me to live is **gold**’. The clerk toiling for his master responds ‘to me to live is **subsistence**’. The scholar may reply ‘to me to live is **learning**’. The soldier says ‘to me to live is **glory**’.

A walk through the capitol rotunda would find many different answers as well. Those seeking office might say, “To me to live is winning my next election.” The ambitious lawmaker might respond, “To me to live is gaining a position of leadership and influence”. The lobbyist replies, “To me to live is seeing my issue or cause advanced”. How do you answer the question? The citizen of heaven answers, “To me to live is **Christ**”. Spurgeon continues

BIBLE STUDIES

LOBBYIST / STAFF STUDY: TUESDAYS, 12:00 NOON – TREASURER’S CONFERENCE ROOM (EB 54)
LEGISLATOR / ELECTED OFFICIAL STUDY: THURSDAYS 8:00 A.M., SENATE PRES. CONF. ROOM (M219).
12:00 NOON, TREASURER’S CONF. ROOM (EB 54)

A Matter of Life and Death in the Capitol (Philippians 1:21)

in his message:

“But there walks one, a humble tent maker, called Paul. You see him step into the middle of them all and say, “For to me to live is Christ.” Though the rest scoff at him for having chosen such an objective, he was the wisest man of them all! He knew which way was right for Heaven and which would end the best. His soul was wholly possessed with the idea— “For to me to live is Christ.”¹

Paul describes how Christ is the center of his life: “...with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.” (1:20). “Exalted” simply means to be honored, magnified, or lifted up. Paul’s consuming desire was that Jesus Christ would be honored and lifted up through his life or his death. Jesus dominated his thoughts, which we clearly see in this short letter we are studying.

How did Paul come to the place where he had such a devotion and love for Christ? How do we gain that same priority in our own lives? Though we find it throughout Paul’s writings we see it most succinctly expressed in 1 Timothy 1:15, “***It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.***” Paul saw himself as the foremost of sinners. He never ceased to be amazed at the mercy of God that sent Christ to the cross to suffer and die for his sin. Overwhelmed with that truth, he sought to honor Christ and to share the same good news with others. We need to remember our own sinfulness before God. We are not good people. We have all lied, been angry with others, had immoral thoughts, and more. We might compare ourselves with other people and think we come off all right. But when we compare ourselves with a Holy God, we realize how short we fall from His glory. It is then we are amazed at the grace of God that would provide a way to forgive our sins and make us right with Him.

Does Jesus Christ dominate our thoughts? Are we consumed with a desire to see Christ honored and lifted up though everything we do and say? When we recognize God’s holiness, realize our own sinfulness, and understand what Christ did on the cross to make us right with God, then exalting Jesus will become our consuming desire, not just in life, but also in death.

A MATTER OF DEATH: “...TO DIE IS GAIN”

Living for Christ was not Paul’s only concern. Exalting Jesus in his death was on his mind as well. He faced the distinct possibility of execution. The Philippian believers knew this and were concerned. Paul wrote them not to worry, that even if he died, that it would bring glory to God and gain to him. The possibility of our own death is an issue each of us must consider. Perhaps the loss of three legislative colleagues last year serves as a reminder to us of the uncertainty of life. What “gain” or benefit does the believer find in death?

We will have freedom from suffering and evil – In our last study we spoke of all the trials and suffering Paul endured. In Romans 7:14-25 we read of Paul’s constant struggle with his own indwelling sin. Upon death, the believer will be freed from both.

We will be like Jesus – In 1 John 3:2 John writes: now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.

We will be with Jesus – Paul writes that to depart (die) is “to be with Christ”. That is what Paul looked forward to most of all. Though he desired to be with Christ, he was willing to remain in order to serve Him, to point others to Him, and to help others grow in Him. This the essence of what Paul meant when he wrote:

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

The only way we can see death as gain is to know for certain that our sins are forgiven and that we are right with God. We are warned in Hebrews 9:27 that “**it is appointed for men to die once, and after this comes judgment**”. When we are aware of our sin, this makes death a fearful thing. But Christ was offered on the cross to bear our sins, and when we trust Him we can know our sins are forgiven and we can face death with no fear of judgment, or, as John writes, “We may have confidence in the day of judgment” (1 John 4:17). More than that, we look forward to being with the One Who loved us and gave Himself for us.

- **HOW DO YOU FILL IN THE BLANK, “FOR ME TO LIVE IS _____”?**
- **CAN YOU SAY WITH PAUL, “FOR ME TO DIE IS GAIN”?**

¹ Spurgeon, C.H. Sermon #146, *The Good Man’s Life and Death*.