

For to Me to Live Is Christ!

Today I am consumed with this glorious thought from Holy Scripture, "*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain*" (Philippians 1:21). Shakespeare's Hamlet ponders life and death when he asks, "To be, or not to be--that is the question: Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune...." Hamlet wonders, is life worth it? To suffer the slings and arrows we must encounter, is it worth it? Then he contemplates: "To die, to sleep--To sleep--perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub, For in that sleep of death what dreams may come?" So now as he mulls over death, he wonders will this really put me out of my miseries; what nightmares may await me in this land beyond the grave? There could not be a stronger contrast than Paul's simple deduction, "*For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain*"! God's servant is saying that although life does present its slings and arrows, I am in this life for Christ and if this is what He wants, He will give grace and glory. If on the other hand I pass from this life as we know it, I have gained. I have Jesus and heaven too! For the Christian, life and death are separated only by a comma! There is so much to be said today for both possibilities, however I want to focus on the statement before the comma, "*For to me to live is Christ,...*" (Philippians 1:21a).

1. "For to me to live is Christ" is making an emphatic declaration!

The great Victorian preacher from England, F. B. Meyer said in commentary on this verse, "We may picture the Apostle Paul landing on the quay at Neapolis, the port of Philippi. His dress betokens travel and toil. Evidently a poor and somewhat insignificant man, unattended save by two or three as poor as himself. As he lands upon the busy quay he encounters many different men. There, for instance, is the merchant receiving his wares from the Orient, and preparing them for transit; he cries: 'To me to live is wealth.' Near him are the men who carry the packages from the ships to the emporiums of trade, or the great warehouses--the poor slaves--for them to live is toil and suffering, heavy blows and privations. Beside stands the philosopher, in his hand the scroll with the mystic words of wide knowledge, and as he looks upon the toil of the trader he prides himself that he lives for a superior aim, as he says: 'To me to live is knowledge.' Near to the little group is a soldier, who looks with contempt upon the man of letters, and cries: 'To me to live is fame.' Then the shadow of Octavius, the mighty emperor, who not far from Philippi won the great battle that gave him the empire of the known world, seems to rise amongst the group, crying in awful accents: 'To me to live is empire.' Amid all these voices the affirmation of the Apostle strikes in: 'To me to live is not wealth, nor hard work, nor literature, nor fame, nor glory, but Christ. Christ first, last, midst, all in all, and perpetually Christ.'"

We may say with Paul, "*When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory*" (Colossians 3:4). In other words, I will gain the glory with Christ in heaven, but until then, I will understand that Christ

is my life right now! Yes, I shall appear like Him when He returns, but I shall live for and like Him in the present moment. Christ is my life. Paul was saying, for me -- whatever anyone else decides; whatever life may be to others -- for me, Christ is my life. This is most emphatic!

Vladimir Lenin was the fanatical architect of the former USSR. A colleague once said of him, "Lenin thinks about nothing but revolution. He talks about nothing but revolution. He eats and drinks revolution. And if he dreams at night, he must dream about revolution." I would be honored if someone could some day say of me, "Johnny Pope thinks about nothing but Jesus. He talks about nothing but Jesus. He eats and drinks Jesus. And if he dreams at night, he must dream about Jesus."

2. "For to me to live is Christ" is affirming that Christ is my essence in life.

This is not only a lifestyle, this is my life, the very essence. Essence, by definition, is the attribute or set of attributes that make an object or substance what it fundamentally is, and which it has by necessity, and without which it loses its identity.

Please allow me to make an awkward illustration that may clarify what I am trying to say. I have a friend named Gene Howard who makes a living by impersonating John Wayne. Let me point out one aspect of this impersonation: Gene walks like John Wayne. On the other hand I see one of our young soldiers who has lost his leg in one of our recent wars. He is fitted with a prosthetic and he no longer has his former leg; he is fitted with a new one. In essence, this becomes his leg. He stands on it, he walks with it. If he plays ball, he rounds the bases with it. If he runs a marathon (which amazingly, some have), he runs with it. The soldier is saying, this is now my leg, unlike the person who simply walks like another man. Paul said, *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me"* (Galatians 2:20). For us as Christians, we are not adding Jesus on to our life, He has become our life! He has become our identity. When I was younger, I was told in the homespun phrase of older saints, "Son, be Jesus!" This is the essence of true Christianity.

3. "For to me to live is Christ" is acknowledging an exchange of my life.

May the Lord help us to make up our mind on this issue. In Philippians 2:5, Paul said, *"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."* Then Peter said in I Peter 4:1 and 2, *"Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God."* Therefore, we look at our time left on this earth as no longer ours, but Christ's.

When our kids were young, I tried to take turns taking them with me to special meetings in which I preached. One day my son, Jonathan and I traveled to Lake Charles, Louisiana. He was probably five years old. We were given the

address of our motel and as I checked in, we received our room key. As I walked to the room, I noticed although it was a nice corner room, it was near the major highway and when I rose in the morning to pray, I wanted to be in a quieter atmosphere. So I went back to the desk and told them my desire to be in a more secluded room. They willingly obliged and we were placed in the back of the property. I awoke early the next day to pray and read my Bible. Immediately, I noticed the electricity was not on. This did not bother me because I was in prayer and the temperature was fine in the room, so no need to call the desk and notify them of the absence of electricity, waking up the boy in the process. Well, after I got through with my prayer time, I got Jonathan up to go with me to breakfast. As we approached the front of the motel property, I saw flashing lights, debris and other evidence of a cataclysmic occurrence. In the early morning hours, a huge dump truck traveling at a high speed careened off the road, became airborne and crashed into the corner room on the front of the motel property – the very room that Jonathan and I already had a key for, but changed at the last minute. As I held my little boy's hand and walked through the rubble of where the room used to be, I saw where my son would have been sleeping and the area where I would have been praying and I realized, the chances of our being alive would have been from remote to none had we not asked for another room. Now had we died in that room, Paul said the outcome would have been gain, but the very reason I changed rooms was to have a more private place to pray. The simple activity of praying and worshipping Jesus saved our lives. I owe Jesus my life. Let me go a step further, Christ is my life! I live because of Christ. I have made the exchange - His life for mine -- so that I might say with the apostle, *"...That he (I) no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God."*

-Pastor Pope-

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