

**Intro words: Paul said, “for to me, to live is Christ,” but what do we say? For us, to live is \_\_\_\_\_, what? Listen today and find out how many people answer this question.**

## **15 Phil – To live is Christ and to die is gain**

“For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

Paul wrote these words with conviction. He thought on the many adventures he had experienced, the dangers he had faced, and the trials he had endured. He smiled. It was worth it all. For him, there was nothing else. For him, all else was rubbish. For him, to live was Christ.

Life meant so many other things to others. For the Greeks, to live was wisdom, the acquisition of philosophical knowledge in order to understand the universe better. For the Jews, to live was Torah – obedience to the laws of Moses. For the Romans to live was power and the order and peace it brought in the Mediterranean world. But whatever it was to these groups, to Paul, to live was Christ.

How do you fill in the blank? How do you write this sentence, “For to me to live is ... what?” Everything in your life depends upon it.

I have discovered that people live for four things. They all start with the letter P. I call them the four Ps of life.

The first is power. For some, they fill in the blank, “for to me to live is power.” They want, more than anything else, to be first, not necessarily to have the adoring praise of others but they want to be first because they want to be in control. It may not be that they want to dominate others, but they want to make sure no one dominates them, and they make sure their way is the only way because they will have no other way. These are people who are natural born leaders, and leadership is a good thing and God makes people this way. But sin distorts our leadership so that we become drunk with the wine of power and rather than use our leadership for the good of others and to serve society, we lust for it for our selfish ends.

This can show up in a small way at home where one spouse wants to dominate the other rather than live in harmony and blend abilities and gifts. This could show up in a larger way where despots rule a nation and have absolute control. I cannot help but think of the Roman emperors, some of them crazed, and all of them blasphemous as they required people to proclaim them lord and god. And I am sure that some of them knew they were not a god but they foisted this lie upon the people because it helped to maintain order and keep them in power. For them, to live was power.

What would it be like to live in such a society? I think of the desperate plight of the people of North Korea who have for three generations now lived under the cult of their so-called “dear leaders” who demand absolute loyalty. It is a travesty to see them on television and to watch the others in their regime clap for them with such enthusiasm and honor knowing that if they don’t their lives will be forfeit. I read that when North Korea launched their long range missile – which failed – the cost for that experiment would have been enough to feed most of their population for one year. What a travesty! These leaders are trying to build missiles and not taking care of their people. This is one of the worst examples of filling in the blank – for to me to live is power.

What a contrast with Jesus. Just a few short sentences away Paul will speak of Jesus as one who emptied and humbled himself. You know the verses I am speaking of in chapter 2. Listen to Paul’s majestic words: “Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, for even though he existed in the form of God, he did not regard his equality with God a thing to be held onto but he emptied himself of this outward glory and made himself a servant and being found in appearance as a man, as a servant, he humbled himself all the way to death on a Roman cross.” What a contrast this is to those who say “to live is power.” The Lord of glory came as a servant.

The night he was betrayed he took off his outer garments, put a towel around himself and washed the feet of his disciples. Then, he said, “do you know what I have done? If I, the Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you should wash one another’s feet. You should be servants.”

To live is to be a servant. To live is to seek the welfare of others as well as your own. When we say “for to me, to live is Christ, we have to put some content into that and we have to say, “for to me to live is to be a servant as Christ was a servant and not to dominate others but to build up others.

People fill in the blank a second way. They say, “for to me, to live is ... possessions.” Remember the old bumper sticker that used to say, “he who dies with the most toys wins”? That’s the way it is for so many. Life is about accumulating ever increasing possessions – newer cars, bigger houses, newer appliances, better neighborhoods, and on and on – newer, bigger, better, shinier.

I know sometimes we need these things. A while back my wife and I remodeled our kitchen and we have new appliances, new granite countertops, and a new floor. We needed them and bought them but that doesn’t define who we are. We don’t say, “For me to live is possessions.” My daughter said to me one time, “Dad you are the most non-materialistic person I have ever seen.” I’m not sure if that was a compliment but I took it that way. Material possessions don’t impress me. I don’t need the latest gadget. I don’t have to have the newest this or that every year. My wife is happy with \$1 blouses from garage sales. It’s not that we are boasting– some things just have little value and meaning because for us to live is Christ.

And what did Christ say? How did he teach us to live? He said, “Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, *and* running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.” Don’t be accumulators. Be givers. Life is not about what you possess but about what you give. And, may I add, that Christ promises us true possessions that won’t grow old or wear out.

Listen to these words from 1 Peter 1:3-4.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,

I love those three words – our inheritance is imperishable, undefiled, and will not fade away. It is imperishable. It is not like last month's leftovers which we find in the back of the refrigerator that have grown old, moldy and nasty. It will not perish. It is not like our automobiles that get rusty and stop working. Our inheritance will not perish.

Second, our inheritance is undefiled. Imagine what would happen if you bought a nice painting, say a painting of one your children, and you displayed it proudly and prominently in your house, and then one day someone came in, threw garbage on it, marked it up with markers, and cut holes in it. Your cherished painting would be defiled.

That's what has happened with many wonderful earthly gifts. Sin has defiled them. Sin has thrown garbage on them. Sin has polluted them. But our eternal inheritance is undefiled.

Third, our inheritance will not fade away. It will never lose its luster or brilliance. It will never grow old and fade away like beautiful flowers that must eventually be cut down.

You see, God is not against possessions. God richly made all things for us to enjoy, Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 6:17. But God's heart is broken when we turn possessions into idols. God's heart is broken when we love the gifts more than the Giver. God's heart is grieved when we say, not with our words, but by our practices, "for to me to live is possessions." That will only harm us when we let possessions reign over our lives.

And so when we say "for to me, to live is Christ, we have to put some content into that and we have to say, "for to me to live is to be a giver as Christ was a giver and not to seek to get as much as I can. And for me to live is lay up treasures in heaven and not to lay up treasures on earth." This is what Philippians 1:21 means.

As I mentioned there are two other wrong ways to fill in the blank – and we'll get to those in our next broadcast. But today I want to close by focusing on being servants and givers. I want to ask you, "who can you serve? Who needs your attention? Who needs a kind word from you?" Perhaps a widow needs some company for a while or an orphan needs mentoring. Maybe you know someone physically disabled and you need to mow their lawn. When we say, "for to me to live is Christ, we need to put some meat on those bare statements, or we need to put some feet on those words and make them practical.

And are you a giver? Do you manage your resources in such a way that you are able to give to your church and even to give extra to people or to ministries? Make it your goal, not to see how much you can accumulate, but how much you can give away. For to me, to live is Christ.

Paul said in 1:20 his earnest expectation and hope was that Christ would be magnified in his body in every way – if he died or if he continued to live. He wanted to ensure that whatever was before him would be for the glory of Christ because for him life was all about Jesus Christ.

And may God give us grace that we may we say the same about our lives.