

TO LIVE IS CHRIST, TO DIE IS GAIN

Philippians 1:1-30 (Key verse 1:21)

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

I thank God for the Philippians study. In today's passage we learn about the power behind Apostle Paul's preaching of the gospel of Christ, even though he was in prison. Paul found out personally what his purpose is, and this was his purpose; to exalt Christ whether by life or by death. It is such a remarkable faith! In this letter to the church he so dearly loved; the church in Philippi, we'll get to understand what it means that 'To live is Christ, and to die is gain'. How many of us only think God is glorified only when all is going well? How many of us can also exalt God when there are troubles, challenges and a lot of sufferings? How many of us have such a broad insight, and understanding to exalt God in all good or bad circumstances? I therefore pray that the Holy Spirit bless this word, and open our hearts so that we can exalt God through this gospel of Jesus Christ with this purpose, and faith – 'To live is Christ, to die is gain'.

How could Apostle Paul powerfully advance the gospel of Christ Jesus, even though he was imprisoned?

(1). Paul could advance the gospel of Christ because he believed that God who started the good work, will carry it on to completion. The Lord God started the good work of salvation in the Philippians church through Paul's missionary journey. It is the good work because even the gentiles, such as those in Philippi, would also come to repentance and the knowledge of Jesus Christ. God worked mightily through Paul and his co-workers in Philippi. The Lord opened the heart of Lydia; a dealer in purple cloth, to respond positively to Paul's preaching. She was so moved by the message of the gospel, that she opened her house and accommodated Paul and his co-workers to stay at her house. She a co-worker of the gospel. She must have also served Paul and the other servants of the gospel with delicious hot food, and nicely cleaned bedrooms for resting from their labour of the gospel. It was also in this region of Philippi where Paul delivered a slave girl from an evil spirit, and her evil slave masters who made money out of her. Indeed, the kingdom of God came to these people as well. The people were angry with Paul and Silas, and reported them to the magistrate who later had them flogged and locked in jail. However, as Paul and Silas were singing hymns to God and praying, the Lord God miraculously opened the prison doors. The jailer was so scared that he wanted to kill himself for he thought the prisoners escaped on his watch. However, Paul and Silas were still there. This shocked the man that we fell before Paul and Silas asking, 'Sirs what must I do to be saved?' It was at this moment that salvation also came in the jailer's heart, including his household. This was indeed the great work of God in Philippi.

I can understand why Paul was so encouraged and inspired by the mighty move of God in this region. Look at verse 3-4, **3 I thank my God every time I remember you. 4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy.** I can also understand why Paul was so thankful, prayerful and filled with joy whenever he thought of the Philippians church. They were very special indeed; God's holy people because God started this wonderful good work in them. They are the objects of God's love and glory. They too share in the grace of God, just Paul does. Paul could, but only pray for them to that their love may abound more and more in knowledge and insight, and that they be filled with the fruits of righteousness that come through Christ Jesus. Look at verses 9-11. **9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.** These two prayer topics are very important so that God can continue to work through their love to bless and advance the gospel to even other churches and nations. It is for this reason that Paul and the church in Philippi were such a formidable team; advancing the Gospel of Christ and exalt Him. Yes, when we see the work of God in people's lives, we are able to love them genuinely so as Paul did to the Philippians church. Yes, when we see the hand of God in people's lives, we are able to also grow in the fruits of righteousness because we are encouraged by the evidence of the presence of God who has touched and changed them to salvation. Let us look around us, and look at the person sitting next to you. Have you seen the work of God in him? Have you see the mighty work of God in her life? When you study the bible with your sheep, don't you see the good work that God has started in them? I am sure there is more than enough evidence that indeed God is at work. So, for this reason, may our hearts overflow with such love because those people are precious to God. Inspired by mighty work of God in them, let us therefore be encouraged to bear fruits of righteousness.

Let us look at the work of God, and marvel! Let us look at the good work of God and praise God! Let us look at the work of God and be filled with victory! Paul could advance the gospel of Jesus because its success was not dependent on him nor any human being, but was dependent of the might and faithfulness of God. God is faithful, and He is above all. Who can dare stop Him? No one! There is no form of opposition nor evil that can stop Him. In fact, what all these do is nothing but fuelling the work of God to spread like wild

fire. I am sure that many of us might be going through many challenges and uncertainties in our lives. Many of us might be battling secretly against our hidden sins, and even those we are not even aware of. Because of that, we might question the love of God, and also bring cast doubt on our very own salvation; *'am I really saved, ... why am I going through these hardships'*? we can however stand firm in Christ and believe, with absolute certainty, that God who started this good work in us, will most certainly carry it to its completion. Let's look around us; did covid_19 stop the good work of God? Absolutely not! Here we are, worshipping God online despite the many limitations, be it financial or emotional limitations. Why? Because God is faithful, and His might is more than able to bring to completion His work. It is for this reason then, that we can be confident, in all circumstances, whether good or bad, whether free or imprisoned, whether living or dead, that God will bring His good work to its completion in us. I therefore pray, that we all look beyond our challenges, but look at the might of God, and His faithfulness, to be sure of victory and in all confidence know that His good work in us will be brought to completion by Him alone. Amen!

Let us go back to the question I had asked earlier: How could Apostle Paul powerfully advance the gospel of Christ Jesus, even though he was imprisoned?

(2). Paul could advance the gospel of Christ because he found out that 'To live is Christ, and To die is gain'. Apostle Paul believed in the sovereignty of God. God is sovereign in life, and even in death; all things work out for His own pleasure and His holy will. Paul found out that there is no way that he can be ashamed, nor defeated in the cause of advancing the gospel of Christ. No prison, nor beating, nor rivalry nor envy could ever shame him and bring the work of God to a halt. Rather, he was encouraged and emboldened all the more to exalt Christ Jesus, whether by life or by death. It actually becomes quite difficult to choose between the two; death of life, because in all, victory is certain, and Christ Jesus is glorified nonetheless. What a profound life purpose!

What does it mean then to 'To live is Christ'? Look at verse 22,24-26. ***22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me, 24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. 25 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, 26 so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.*** This is how Paul used his life as long as he was still alive. He saw being alive as an opportunity to work for the Lord Jesus, and produce good fruits. No one can work when dead. He found it necessary to the Philippians church to remain in the body with them, and continue to serve them, taking care of them until the Lord God deems it enough. Throughout his life, Paul would labor for the church so that they show good progress, and continue to grow even in confidence in the Lord Jesus. This was Paul's life purpose.

Apostle Paul was very much Christ centred and his life; what he did, said and thought of reflected how he made Jesus as the centre of His life. He identifies himself as a servant of Christ. He also saw the people of Philippi as God's holy people in Christ. This is how much he centred himself in Christ Jesus. He saw himself, and saw the church of Philippi, with the eyes of God. Aren't we tired of viewing ourselves and each other with our own feeble and limited eyes? Can we for once see who we truly are in Christ Jesus? We are God's precious sons and daughters. We are God's precious servants, God's sheep who are forever under His wings and careful eyes. We are God's holy people, His treasured possession. When we know this, we can understand what it means to that 'To live is Christ'.

What then does it mean 'To die is gain'? How can one gain from death? I thought death is the end of it all, and many times used as a means of expressing loss. Here death also represent all other undesirable outcomes in life, not only departing from the physical form. From our common understanding of death, there is no joy death. It is all lamentations; suffering and crying. How can death be gain? Look at verse 23 to understand what Paul meant by this. ***23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.*** To die is gain because death is a gateway to being with Christ, and is better by far! This is where we all long to be; to be with Christ Jesus, free from the toiling, weeping and the sufferings of this messed up world that will too come to an end. Our souls long to be with Lord Jesus and see Him face to face. Our hearts long to be out from this sinful realm and be with Jesus in heaven where there will be no more weeping nor dying, but eternal peace and joy. So then, shall we be defeated by the other manifestations of death? By no means no! To die is gain. No death or any form of it is for our detriment, but rather it is for our good and the glory of God. Look at verse 12-14. ***12 Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. 13 As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14 And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.*** There is no doubt that Paul faced these elements of death. He called by God to be the light for the gentiles. He met the Lord Jesus and received this calling. Many of us would think that everything he touches would be gold; that in all his labor there will be no issues nor sufferings. But that was not the case. Even the Lord Jesus warned him

that he will suffer for His name in Act 9:15-16. **15 But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."** So, how can we gain from these manifestations of death? It is gain because God is glorified all the more through these sufferings when His work triumphs and transcendent above these limitations. Even for us, it is gain because we experience God more deeper than before in these sufferings. Moreover, it is gain because through Christ Jesus, these sufferings are a means to become more confident and more bold to remain in the Lord. Look at the response of the Philippians when they've heard Paul was suffering and imprisoned. It makes logical sense for them to be crippled by fear, and justified to abandon the gospel. However, because to die is gain, they amazingly became all the more confident in the Lord, and dared all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear!

Moreover, in every way, Christ is preached nonetheless. Look at verse **15 It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. 16 The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains.** As we live, we do experience many challenges. Yes, Christians do face many troubles and deathly experiences. They also suffer and experience opposition from wicked minded people who preach the gospel, not out of goodwill, but out of envy and rivalry. This would cause us much harm to other Christians who are sincere before God. However, **18 But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice.** To live is Christ, and to die is gain. Even if there be such, we are confident that Christ is preached nonetheless, and He'll continue to work and save His children. There is no amount of suffering, nor false teachings nor envy, nor rivalry that would block the preaching of Christ. Absolutely not! Christ is preached nonetheless, and for this we rejoice and are confident in the Lord in all circumstances, whether in life or death. So then, what can we say? All things work out to fulfil the will of God – whether by death or life. This is why Paul, a very restricted man to the human eye, could preach and advance the gospel of God so powerfully to the Philippians, and the many other churches even today, because it was a win-win for him – 'To live is Christ, and To die is gain'. Once again, I pray that we focus and fix our eyes and lives in Jesus for us to also experience this victory. Amen!

Some of you might have heard of my recent incident. This week on Monday, I got hijacked at gun point in Pretoria by a group of criminals. As a result, all my valuable personal belongings were stolen including my car, cell phone, whatever little money they found in my account, my sporting equipment and the clothes & shoes – so much for using my car as a wardrobe. It was initially quite violent as I was hit by the gun on my head, and when I realised that they had guns, I stopped fighting back. They took off with me at the back of the car, blind folded and my hands tied behind me. They pushed me back to lie down as they drove off for about 40 minutes outside the city to an unknown place, where they changed me from my car to another car and held me hostage for about 40 minutes or more in some yard. They kept asking questions about my banking pin number, were I am working and who I am staying with so that they could solicit more money. They also asked about my car insurance details and car tracker which were not in place ever since I stopped working. As I was being driven and held hostage, it came upon me that this could be my very last day on earth. In fact I was so sure of my death that I began to pray to God for forgiveness of my sins, and to take care of those I will leave behind. After dwelling on this prayer point, I got some sort of boldness. I was now praying for God to preserve and save my life from the hands of this criminals. I saw myself meditating on bible verses and singing, in my heart, hymns & songs of deliverance to the Lord God. I became very calm in my heart, and co operated with those criminals. I was never that vulnerable ever in my life before. I even saw myself begging one of the criminals from leaving me alone in the hostage car. That was really messed up. I got dropped off to some area in Mamelodi, and by the grace of God my life was preserved. I called for help from my brothers Donald & Katlego to come fetch me at the police station, also helped by a good Samaritan young man who showed me around late at night in the curfew how to get to the police station, and also helped by a tuck shop owner to make a call, giving me a taxi fare and transported to the police station by a good Samaritan taxi driver who is renowned at the police station for bringing other people who might have been mugged, hijacked or stabbed. I saw the great hand of God who spared and saved my life from these criminals. Yes, I have lost my car and other valuable, however I am so grateful of God who saved me. I am confident that He is able to recover my valuables as He did to David and his men.

In light of this message, I can see what it means 'To live is Christ, and to die is gain'. Yes I am alive, and it is for this purpose of advancing His gospel and to exalt Him in my body. Had I died, that would also have been for my gain that I would've been with the Lord at this time. However, I learn that God is not done with me as yet. He still has task for me to bring to its completion through my life. It is for this that I am grateful, giving praise to the Lord who has considered a terrible sinner like me, special to be His instrument of salvation. I am also reminded how He called me as a campus shepherd to be the light of gentiles - **Isaiah 49: 6 he says: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.** My mother broke down in tears when I called her about what happened. She was crying complaining about the many issues that I am going through, asking God to relent and stop

them. But I thank God also for strengthening me to show her the bigger picture and see the great hand of God who spared my life because the worst for her could've happened had I died, but the Lord saved me and we should be grateful. She eventually understood and calmed down. She told me that she left her house and went into the veld at night filled with thanksgiving in her heart where she praised God – poor animals. The work of God still continues to surge on, that even my mother was able to come before God and praise Him. God used my deathly experience and my life to save her. Even her name is written in the great book of eternal life in heaven.

In conclusion, we are all alive aren't we? We are not dead; God has given us breath to live as we are here. Let us therefore live lives worthy of the gospel with this faith – To live is Christ and To die is gain. We need not be worried about the opposers of the gospel nor any form of harm, suffering nor loss we might suffer, but rather, we can with this faith, stand firm in Christ Jesus together as one, and instead of fearing oppositions, but to fear God demonstrated how we live our lives [27-30]. May the Lord God be glorified in our lives now and forever until we meet Him face to face. Amen!