

To Live is Christ

If you picked up a bulletin this morning you noticed that the space reserved for the sermon notes were left blank. No, you can't go home early, and yes I'm still speaking this morning. We'll come back to that a little later and hopefully it will make sense then.

We find ourselves in the book of Philippians this morning. If you have been keeping up with your daily reading then you've already seen the first few letters that Paul wrote to some of the early churches he helped plant. This letter is a bit different from the others. Just to recap, In Corinthians we see Paul writing to address a number of problems, one of the biggest being a church split. In Galatians we see Paul address some theological issues. Ephesians takes a slightly more upbeat turn as Paul is writing this letter as a guide on how to live a Christian life. And now here we are in Philippians. This is a letter to the church of Philippi thanking them for their support of his work, and to encourage and give them hope.

It's a whole lot here to unpack and I went back and forth on what I was going to speak on. I wanted to avoid some of the more well-known verses but I feel like God kept leading me in a certain direction that not only fits where I am in my personal walk, but where we are as a church and where we are going.

Let's look at a verse that I'm sure most of you know very well.

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

I studied this verse and its meaning a great deal. A lot of scholars think Paul is describing his walk with Christ as a win/win. In living for Christ Paul is able to manifest Christ, making Christ known through his own life. In death Paul gets to be with Christ. It's the following verses that bring new meaning to this verse for me.

Philippians 1:22 If I am to go on living in the body this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know. Verse 23: I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; Verse 24: but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.

I think what Paul is saying here is that death is not the sacrifice. Getting to be with Christ is the reward. It's living for Christ that is the sacrifice. Paul knew that there was still work to be done. That's made clear in verse 22. He knows there are sacrifices that must be made. He is struggling with what he wants more, to continue to endure persecution and preach the gospel or to be taken to eternity with Christ. We see in verse 24 that Paul comes to the conclusion that since God's will is for others to be saved, it is better for him to be alive. Paul knew there was still work to do. He could have come up with any number of excuses to just throw in the towel. He could have easily stopped preaching and let things calm down until he was freed from prison. He could have easily just welcomed death as his sentence. But he didn't. Even while being imprisoned for preaching the gospel, Paul continued to preach the gospel. He knew what was required of him. That's the main thing I want us to see this morning.

LIVING FOR CHRIST IS NOT AN EXCUSE TO DO LESS, IT'S A REQUIREMENT TO DO MORE

As Christians, we are required to do the fruitful labor Paul mentions in verse 22. We are required to do the work that Paul knew was needed to be done. We need to be ready to make those sacrifices necessary to do the work that's needed. **WHAT IS THE WORK YOU ARE TALKING ABOUT? In**

case you haven't put it together, the work I am talking about is reaching people with the gospel. What are we willing to sacrifice as a church to do the work that's needed? What are we willing to sacrifice in our own lives to see people come to know Christ? As I examined my own life I found there were things I want to sacrifice, and then things I need to ask God for the strength to be able to sacrifice.

The first thing that came to my mind is that I need to be willing and should want to sacrifice my reputation. Reputation, our characteristics, how we are perceived by others. Right now most people know me as David the bread man, who goes to church sometimes. David, a nice guy, fight fan, guy involved with his church. While Paul was in prison the guards and many others knew he was there for Christ. He was known as someone that would share the gospel no matter the circumstance. That's the reputation I want. I want to be known as David, someone who desires to see people come to know Christ. Someone who will share the gospel no matter the circumstance, someone who desires to see God continue to work in his life, and he also happens to run a bread route and be a fight fan. As long as people know me as someone who shares the gospel none of the other stuff matters.

I need to be willing to sacrifice my friends. What I mean by this is that I need to understand that living for Christ could cause me to lose some good friends of mine. This was one is really personal for me. I have two really good friends that I have been trying to share the gospel with. It's been a long process with mixed results. I'm afraid to push to far because I know the endgame could be a ruined relationship. Seeing them come to know Christ should be more important than having some buddies to watch sports with. I must be willing to make that sacrifice.

I need to be willing to sacrifice my comfort. I don't think Paul was too comfortable chained to the floor of a Roman prison, but that didn't stop him from sharing the gospel. It's been to many times I have said things like: I just don't feel comfortable having that conversation yet, or I'm not comfortable talking about this at work. I have to let all of that go. I can't have any excuses not to share the gospel anymore. As a Christian its required of me.

I can remember when I first came on the deacon board I had this feeling like I had made it. Like I had hit some sort of spiritual benchmark. That was my excuse, I don't need to pray as much anymore, I don't need to study as much anymore. I've made it. I'm good now. I'm already on the deacon board and help with children's ministry I don't need to be involved with anything else I called myself living for Christ but had a thousand excuses why I could do less. I dont need to share the gospel, someone else will do it. As Christians it is our requirement and responsibility to share the gospel. If we don't do it then it won't get done. LIVING FOR CHRIST IS NOT AND EXCUSE TO DO LESS, IT IS A REQUIREMENT TO DO MORE.

As we relaunch as Stone Creek Church we can't have the excuse that the building is complete and now we can let our foot off the gas pedal. We can't have that feeling like we've made it. As we launch at the new building the real work is just beginning. We must be willing to make the sacrifices to get the work done, to share the gospel, to see people come to know Christ. Just as Paul was encouraging the church at Philippi, I want to encourage you this morning.

OUR STRENGHT IS IN OUR SACRIFICE

The more we sacrifice the more we depend on Christ. The more we depend on Christ the more

our faith in Christ grows. The more our faith in Christ grows the more we can sacrifice. If we truly want to see people come to know Christ, if we want to see to God bless Stone Creek Church, if we truly desire to see people's lives transformed then we must depend on Christ in all things. (Why does that sound so familiar?)

You see the blank page in your bulletin, here is where we tie it all in. Let's imagine that we are a church in Paul's time. We are launching a new church. We get to start with a blank slate. We get to determine what kind of letter we will be receiving. Will it be similar to Corinthians or Galatians? Or will it be one similar to the church at Phillipi, one of thanks, encouragement, and hope. The only way it looks like that is if we are willing to do the work that is required. LIVING FOR CHRIST IS NOT AN EXCUSE TO DO LESS, IT'S A REQUIREMENT TO DO MORE.

I want you to use this blank page in your bulletin, I want you to write down prayers for our church. Whatever is on your heart. My prayer is that God would use us to do the work that's needed to see people come to know HIM. Write down names of the people you have been praying for individually that you are sharing the gospel with. Pray for strength to start having those conversations. Keep it where you can go back to it and pray over what you written down the next few months as we transition to the new location. If you are visiting with us this morning and maybe this doesn't relate to you, maybe you don't have that relationship with Christ. I want to encourage you that you can leave here this morning with a blank slate, a new start. A new start in Jesus Christ.

As our praise team comes, just close your eyes for a moment. We get a new start as a church. A chance to determine what kind of church we will be. Let's not have any excuses. If you God has been speaking to you this morning, maybe you're wondering how you can get a fresh start, leave here with a blank slate. It's real simple. Just put your trust in Jesus. Trust that he loved you enough to die for your sins, to pay a price you couldn't pay on your own, that he rose again and claimed victory over death so that you can claim victory in HIM. As our praise team sings this song, if you feel that God has been speaking to you, Pastor Shevi or myself are here to pray with you. Let's stand and sing and then we'll dismiss.