

To Live Is Christ

Belcroft Bible Church

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Well, good morning, church. It is, as always, a huge blessing and a humbling time whenever I have a chance to fill the pulpit. It's a grand reminder of the appropriate fear of the Lord. And I come before you humbly. It's always a humbling thing when your daughter leans over to you and says, "Be brave, Dad," as you're going up in front of the people that you love. I'm standing before you, though not on what I have to say, as what I can say is of very little value. But, rather, I aim to boldly share the Word of the one true God, as that's the only thing that I can give you. That's of real value. I could tell you stories. I could tell you jokes. I know a lot of good jokes. I'm a dad and a middle school principal—trust me—and I have lots of jokes. But none of those are of any value. None of those have impact. The Word of God is what truly has an impact. The Word of God is truly powerful.

You are a blessing, church. Even as I look around and see you here this morning, what a blessing it is to be with you. Thank you for how you're growing and responding to God's Word. Continue to grow in the reading and understanding of God's Word. I have the privilege to read to you and teach from Philipians today, but do not let it end there. Go home and meditate on it. Take time to discuss the Word of the Lord. Digest Scripture, as you're called by Scripture to do. The teacher in me says, "Do your homework." As many of you who joined me in FOF this past year heard me say, week after week, and even made you raise your hands: "Did you do your homework?" Don't only eat on Sundays. It's not good for you to eat one day out of the week. Make sure you're spending time in God's Word. You're only cheating yourself by not doing so.

That being said, now, let's turn to God's Word. Please turn with me in your copy of God's Word to Philipians 1, starting in verse 15. If you've been at Belcroft for the past few years, remember that just as Neal is preaching diligently through the book of 1 Peter, I have the privilege of preaching, verse by verse, through the book of Philipians. I get to

walk you through the Epistle of Joy. Now, at this rate, with me preaching about six or seven verses a year, we might get through it by the time my daughters graduate from college. But hopefully you've been able to turn to Philippians 1, starting in verse 15. Follow along with me as I read.

Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

Will you pray with me? Dear heavenly Father, Lord, we commit this time to you. Thank you for your Word. Thank you for giving us truth and the solid ground on which we stand. Bless this time of study and teaching that it might further the gospel, prod your people and drive us to serve you, all for your glory. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

So what's the most important thing in your life? What really drives you? What excites you? People are frequently marked by the things they're involved in. Could be as simple as wearing a T-shirt that has your company logo on it; could be a sports team that you cheer for; could be bumper stickers for things you believe in. I remember when I was a kid, there was a popular T-shirt that said, “_____ is life and all the rest is just details.” There was a kiosk at the mall that had these shirts in every and every possible rendition. There was “Soccer is life and all the rest is just details.” “Golf is life.” “Horses are life.” “Cats are life.” I had friends that had these shirts, and I like to believe they didn't really think that these temporary things were what truly defined them.

But what we've learned, time and time again, is that we're made for worship. We're going to worship someone or something. All too often, that which we are worshiping and dedicating so much of our time and energy into is nothing worth worshiping. I mean, I like soccer. I like horses. I like golf some days. But none of these things deserve to be given the distinction of "being life." None of these things are life-giving. There is one who is truly life-giving, and that's who Paul's speaking of here. Paul is continuing in his letter to the church at Philippi, telling them of the joy he has in Christ. He's stressing the importance of Christ in his life and applying this to their lives and circumstances as well.

It was such a blessing last week to hear Ryan Itzel share from 1 Corinthians telling of the centrality, the clarity, and the conviction of the Word. Paul is telling the same thing to the church in Philippi. As he said to the church in Corinth, the Word, the gospel, is paramount. Don't ever forget that. During Pastor Matt's sabbatical, now you've heard a second man filling the pulpit reminding you, the Word is paramount. The gospel is essential. Don't deviate from the Word of the Lord. If there's nothing else you hear from me this morning, I need you to know the importance of God's Word. There's nothing I can give you that compares to, rivals, or even comes close to the weight of the one true Creator of the universe, redeeming sinful man through the sacrificial gift of His perfect Son, that we might be restored to right relationship with Him, and be called to respond through repentance that we might be sanctified. That's the heart of what Paul is saying. That's the good news of the gospel throughout all of Scripture. That's God's perfect, unchanging design. There's nothing that can be or should be the center of our lives apart from Christ. We will see why Paul says this as we dive into the passage.

As we look at the specific text in Philippians, it's important, as is always important whenever we look at passage, we're studying to know the context. I spent a good deal of time talking through the context of Philippians in previous sermons, but I want to remind you of where this church is, where Paul is and why he's writing. These points of context only further clarify the importance of this passage. So first, let me remind you of this church in Philippi. The church in Philippi, as the first European church, Paul went there on his second missionary journey, and the city of Philippi had a strong connection to Rome. This is a Roman colony. So, unlike many other cities throughout the empire, even many of the other cities where churches sprung up, Philippi was treated differently. They acted

differently. They acted as if they were in the Roman capital. They were Roman citizens; they had the rights and privileges of Romans; their identity was Roman. If they're wearing baseball caps, it was Rome. They had all those rights that others didn't. We know that this city did not have very many Jewish people, as there wasn't even a synagogue in the city. Which means there were very few Jews. The people actually met on the Sabbath down by the river. Seems rather fitting that we're talking about this, as we're literally meeting down by the river. So, I look behind me and see good wind today, a good day for sailing down by the river.

Paul was not treated well in the city of Philippi. As with many cities where he ended up, he got thrown into their jail. But some faithful believers came out of the city and the church was established and was growing. I encourage you to take time this week, go back, read Acts 16. Read about Paul's visit to Philippi. We learned that, in this mostly Gentile church that was growing, we learned that though they themselves were not a wealthy group of people, they were generous and willing to give support to Paul and his ministry. The generosity of the Philippian believers even caught Paul off guard, as they also gave financially to support the church in Jerusalem. Much like Paul, the church at Philippi was being persecuted for the cause of Christ. They were being attacked by false teachers. The unity of their church was being threatened by a feud between two prominent women within their body. Paul specifically even calls those two ladies out. If you can imagine, the apostle Paul has written a letter to your church, and they stand up to read this letter in the church. And names are mentioned in it, like Eutychus, like "Excellent, wonderful to hear, Eutychus." But could you imagine being one of those ladies who Paul is calling out? I just imagine in my mind one of these ladies kind of sneaking away, as her name is called out. Paul's calling her to call come back, to fix this feud. "You're breaking the church."

And continuing the context, we look where Paul is. Paul wrote this letter from Rome. Now he talked about wanting to go to Rome and preach there. But he got to Rome in a very different way than he was anticipating. Paul's in Rome. Paul is in Rome in his fourth year as a Roman prisoner, waiting Emperor Nero's final decision in the charges against him. I shared last time that Paul was not in a formal prison, but was actually in a home he rented, constantly under guard by the Praetorian Guard. Now, the Praetorian, these were the emperor's own soldiers who were maintained within the city of Rome. They're originally

set up by Caesar Augustus to maintain control of the city, and their number was increased from 5,000 to about 10,000. So these men ultimately carried serious power within the city of Rome, and even had influence to the point of impacting who the next emperor would be. Paul being chained to some of these men had a powerful effect on this group as a whole. Kenneth West describes the impact Paul has of being chained to Roman soldiers as this:

Paul lived for two years with a Roman soldier chained to his wrist. As the different soldiers would take their turn guarding Paul, they would hear the conversations he had with visitors, conversations full of the gospel and the Savior of sinners. They would hear the apostle pray and would listen as he dictated the epistles he wrote. The noble prisoner would talk to them about their souls, talking in the international Greek so common in those days. Thus, the gospel went through the barracks of the Roman soldiers, a place it would not have gone if Paul had not been a prisoner there.

Whether the soldiers liked it or not, Paul was going to keep preaching. They had a front row seat to constant ministry; they got to listen to every conversation. And then, imagine as the visitors left, if these soldiers didn't understand something, they had the means to ask questions of Paul directly. I imagined a session with Paul last year, a couple of hours, and after that person leaves, the guard has a few more hours on his shift, can ask and pry and pray and sing with Paul, what a blessing that was. Then God blessed that ministry. It spread throughout the entirety of that Praetorian Guard and then spread throughout Rome in ways that Paul would never have imagined.

So, to look at the circumstances surrounding the city of Philippi, and Paul, who's writing to encourage these believers, we get a clearer view of their situation. One of the beautiful things about this letter that Paul writes is that, throughout it, he's calling for people to be joyful, to rejoice. He says it about 16 times throughout this brief letter. He reinforces the fact that true biblical joy is not derived from circumstances. It is not a byproduct of our temporary, earthly predicaments, but rather a fruit of our eternal position. True biblical joy is not happiness, but is the hope, comfort, and conviction that comes from the grace of God in the confidence of our salvation. Joy is not driven by one's circumstances, but rather by one's position, which is granted by an unchanging, unwavering, and sovereign

Heavenly Father. While happiness is fleeting and leaves us pursuing it, joy is a security that we have been pursued by Christ. Because of this security, we are commanded to rejoice as it says in 1 Thessalonians 5:16 to 18: *“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”*

Well, this leads all up to where we're going in Scripture today, starting in verse 18. We have Paul reminding us that he is filled with joy. He's rejoicing, and he makes sure to repeat that saying, “Yes, I will rejoice.” He makes clear his purpose and the source of his joy. So, in light of this, I have two short phrases to guide you in our study this morning, Paul's making two clear points. In his true submission, he makes points about living, it being Christ and dying being gain. This statement, which is a very powerful statement, is really the framework for everything else he's going to say in this letter. This is the foundation of all that he's going to say to the Philippians church, because for Paul living is Christ. All his other decisions, and everything else he does, is dictated by this. You could go as far as to say that this statement of “living is Christ; dying is gain” is really the foundation of everything else he has written and will write. We can say this because Paul leads a life dominated by his love and passion for the Savior. He brings forth this brilliant tension of living equaling Christ and dying resulting in gain. In understanding and following Paul's example, we're going to see a Word-centered life and a will-centered death. There's your two points. I tricked you earlier on, but those are the two points for today. A Word-centered life and will-centered death. If you're taking notes, those are the points.

Much of what we're exploring today hinges on verse 21. Paul very clearly says, *“to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”* Paul is looking at a conflict. There's a clear dilemma. He has a problem in front of him, and he's feeling a tension that will drive the rest of this letter, as well as the rest of his life. This point is really a situation where he has two options, two choices, from which he needs to decide, and he deems that there really is no bad option. This is the best kind of problem to have. It doesn't make it easy but, ultimately, it's a win-win. He has two great options and he lays them out. Paul says, *“to live is Christ”*. He is saying that he has completely given over to Christ. As long as he is breathing, he is doing so for his Savior. He reiterates this reality in other letters as well when he writes in Galatians 2:20, *“It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”* He also tells the

believers in Colossae that “it is Christ who is our life” in Colossians 3:4. This is right in line with what Jesus commanded in John 14:4, as He says to His followers, “*Abide in me and I in you.*” Steve Lawson explains his dilemma like this:

The apostle is waiting his trial and possible death. He is unwavering in his single-minded devotion to Christ. With his day in court before him, the outcome unknown to him, his life is presently flashing before his eyes. In such a sobering situation, Paul makes this bold confession of faith. His whole life is consumed with Christ. Everything in his life is bound up in Christ. The passionate pursuit of his whole being is to know and glorify Christ. The sum and substance of his present state is confined in Christ. Every moment of every day is lived for Christ.

This is really what it means to be a Christian. Followers of Christ were first called Christians in Antioch. You see that in Acts 11:26, and it means “a little Christ”. For Christians, Christ is preeminent; everything else is just details. John Stott once said, “Take Christ from Christianity and you disavow it, there's practically nothing left, Christ is the center of Christianity. All else is circumference.”

So, when we're looking at our two points that Paul makes, it's clear there are only two options. Living is for Christ and dying is to be with Christ. So, let's turn to these two points I promised you. First, the first one is a word-centered life. Look back at verses 18 to 21 with me: “*What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*”

What is a word-centered life? Well, first, a word-centered life is a life marked by joy, a life marked by joy. Verse 18 begins highlighting the joy Paul has. Following the example that Paul gives, we see his response to the conflict and circumstances he is under, telling of his constant joy. He tells that it is not important what his afflictions are, but rather that the

gospel goes forth. The advancement of the gospel is what matters most. Paul's life was marked by joy. John MacArthur says of Paul in this passage,

Absolutely nothing could steal Paul's God-given joy. He was expendable. The gospel was not. His own privacy and freedom were incidental, and he cared nothing for personal recognition or credit. Neither did the painful chains of Rome nor even more painful criticism of fellow Christians could keep him from rejoicing, because Christ was being proclaimed, and his church was growing and maturing.

We see the same joy referenced in Psalm 4, verses 7 and 8, as David says, *“You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound. In peace, I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.”*

We often take joy for granted, or we simply don't understand what real joy is. We're confused or allow society to dictate joy to us. As I mentioned earlier, true joy does not come from our circumstances. If it did, Paul certainly wouldn't have it. But true joy comes from this understanding of the blessing of our humble position in Christ, the position of a slave to Christ, someone who is in right submission to a holy God, who is sacrificing the temporal things of this world and of the flesh in order to serve the God who has placed you in a position of great honor. Paul says this in 2 Corinthians 12:9, *“But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”* A Word-centered life begins as a life marked by joy.

A Word-centered life is also marked by hope. In verse 19, Paul speaks of hope. Joy and hope are tightly joined together when he speaks of hope. He's using the word here which translates “to strain the neck” and so is used figuratively to describe an eager longing for something that was coming. In addition to this, Paul is excitedly waiting, waiting what is to come. He's not just wishing for something to happen, but has a confidence in its arrival. It instantly takes me back to when I was a little kid waiting for my friends to arrive for my birthday party. We lived on a farm, so there wasn't a lot of traffic that came our way. But on the day of my birthday party, there would be cars rolling down our long driveway. I would wait at the bay window of my parents' house, looking excitedly to see who would

be the first to arrive. It also makes me think of waiting at the end of the aisle at my own wedding, excitedly waiting for the doors to open and to see Tara walking down the aisle toward me. There's a joy in that expectant hope. When you look into the eyes of an excited kid or a delighted groom, there's no wondering, but rather a straining for that which they await. Paul's marked by hope. This is the same hope we see in Romans 8:28, with a certainty which comes in knowing that God will cause all things to work together for His glory and His good. Paul's life is full of hope.

Regardless of his circumstance, he can be defined as one who is longing and straining to serve Christ and to see Christ. As a believer, we can share in this hope. Paul is calling on the Philippians to imitate him and share in the joy and hope he has. We have the same privilege and calling to strive and strain and hope for our Savior. Not empty wishes, but sovereign guarantee. Scripture consistently points us back to the hope we have in Christ. Michael Houdmann is credited with saying this about our hope:

In the Old Testament the Hebrew word *batah* and its cognates has the meaning of confidence, security, and being without care; therefore, the concept of doubt is not part of this word. We find that meaning in Job 6:20; Psalm 16:9; Psalm 22:9; and Ecclesiastes 9:4. In most instances in the New Testament, the word hope is the Greek *elpis/elpizo*. Again, there is no doubt attached to this word. Therefore, biblical hope is a confident expectation or assurance based upon a sure foundation for which we wait with joy and full confidence. In other words, "There is no doubt about it!"

One of the verses in which we find the word *hope* is Hebrews 11:1. "*Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*" This verse at the beginning of the chapter of faith carries with it all of the confidence that comes with knowing for sure, with no question, what we have been promised by God in His Word. Our faith is confident assurance, for it is founded upon the rock of our salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ. All of the actions of the heroes of the faith recorded in Hebrews 11 were made possible because they had this faith based on their confidence, assurance, or hope in God. As believers, we're called to give an answer for the hope that's within us to anyone who would ask. A Word-centered life is a life marked by hope.

Thirdly, a Word-centered life is a life marked by courage. Paul is living in trouble. Paul doesn't expect things to get easier as time goes by. He knows he'll be going before Caesar for trial. And chances are, if he's released, he'll end up back in prison for preaching the gospel. John MacArthur made a quip about how he usually, looking into a town, wouldn't look to see what the accommodations were but what the prison was like, because that's where he would most likely end up.

Paul's prayers and requests throughout his letters don't surround a bettering of his position. He actually is just praying for boldness and opportunity. In Ephesians 6:19, his request to his friends is to *“pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel”*. He has the same request in Colossians 4:3, as it says, *“Pray for us that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ for which I have been imprisoned--”* Paul has courage and his prayer is for greater courage not to get through his daily trials, but to continue in his ministry for the gospel. He makes note that it is his goal and desire, ultimately, that Christ be honored through his body. We see it again in 1 Corinthians 6:20, where Paul says *“You are bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”* The courage in his life is not fearing man, what people think, but relates back to everything as his primary aim, which is service to the Lord through his confidence and unwavering declaration and teaching of truth.

We are, in the same way, to act boldly in our faith. If our life is centered on the Word, we should have no hesitation in speaking about that which we love so dearly. I often fall into this trap too easily. It's really easy to talk about menial things. Mindless conversation is simple, even talking about trivial things such as sports. How often at work, you'll hear people talking passionately about sports or athletes. People comfortably talk about their hobbies. If you're into an activity you enjoy, how easy is it to talk about. But sometimes we're hesitant about talking about our faith. Sometimes we're excited to talk about other things, because those things often don't associate us with fear. Our passion in the gospel is often trumped by fear, our fear of offending someone, our fear of confrontation. Chances are people aren't going to take offense if you're passionately talking about your vegetable garden. But the gospel is offensive. The gospel is nonsense to unbelievers; the gospel steps on people's toes. When you passionately share your faith, there may be

conflict. There could be conflict. In many cases, there will be conflict. But our passion for Christ, our love for our Savior should drive us to be courageous in how we speak of Him, how we serve Him. Just as Paul has shown courage, has been willing to do all it takes to boldly speak of and serve Christ, we too should be marked by that same courage. A Word-centered life is a life marked by courage.

Fourthly, a Word-centered life is a life marked by fruit. Fruit is essential. If you've ever planted a garden or had fruit trees, there's nothing so frustrating as working and tending to plants and trees only to have nothing produced. Any labor that's being done should be productive. Paul is speaking, in verse 22, that his own labor will be productive. The life he is living in the hard-set pursuit of Christ's will result in fruit for the kingdom. This fruit would include righteous deeds done by God's people, as we see in Ephesians 2:10: *"For we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."* But also, this fruit would include people turning toward Christ and becoming His followers, as Paul references in Romans 1:13.

Lastly, Paul's life would be profitable in increasing the fruit of the Spirit among the believers as he walked with them and guided them in the maturing of their faith. Galatians 5:22 and 23 says, *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."* There are clear markers of someone who is living focused on Christ. These are the byproducts of a Word-centered life. Just as, if you are tending a garden well, the fruit will grow, a life that is saturated in God's Word should be producing these good fruit. A Word-centered life is a life marked by fruit.

Now, as we've seen the tension Paul is feeling, we look at the other option he lays out. He said, "to live is Christ." He actually, in the original Greek, said it far more emphatically. He said, "to live Christ." He couldn't have said it more strongly, and our translation actually weakens the emphasis he placed. But the other option, he says, is gain; the other option is dying. Not that he wants to die in a desperate, sad way, but that he has such confident hope and desire for his Lord that dying is a great option, because he would be removed from all worldly things and distractions, and finally be face to face with that which he loves most, which is his Savior.

Now it's important to note that Paul doesn't say that if he dies, then he'll have to wait somewhere for a long time to see Christ, to see when he comes. He says this confidently, that he will be with his Savior upon death. There's an immediacy in this verse that shows he'll go right away to his presence then, to see His glory. How amazing that will be. Scott Harris says it this way:

There have been many that have faced the fear of death with either resignation or a bold stoicism, but only someone that has a complete confidence in what lies on the other side of death can say what Paul says here. Paul is not afraid of death because it no longer has the victory. Jesus Christ has conquered it and promised his followers eternal life in heaven. The sting of death, which is sin, has also been conquered and Paul knew he could stand before God with confidence because Jesus' death has paid the price of his sin. God reckons the faith of every believer as righteousness before Him.

For Paul, and for every true Christian, death, though an enemy (1 Cor. 15:26), is simply a door to pass through in order to be in the presence of Jesus Christ, and there is no other place Paul would rather be. From the selfish view point, what Christian would not want to exchange the troubles, trials and pain of this world for the glories of being with Jesus in Heaven? Death is a gain for the believer.

Paul has this confidence, and we as believers in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior share that confidence. Death is gain for us as well. But this is not the case for unbelievers. For us, it is gain. For the unbeliever, it is not. Hebrews 10:31 says this: it says, *"It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God."* Heaven and hell are not metaphors, but real places. Our earthly suffering is nothing compared to the wrath of the one true and righteous God. For the unbelievers, for the unredeemed, death is terrifying, or at least it will be if their eyes are open to that truth and that reality.

So, laying out the tension Paul has, that brings us to my second points. First, we had a Word-centered life. Next, we have a will-centered death. As Paul looks at death, again, it's not a bad option. Paul even admits that between these two options, he doesn't know which to choose. Paul's usually quite decisive, so this is a little uncharacteristic of Paul. He finds himself with the struggle of realizing two good things, realizing that living would benefit the kingdom and would mean longer service. Dying would be bringing him peace

and being in the presence of God. In some ways, he sees this is in the hands of Nero, who's going to decide his case. But, ultimately, it rests in the hands of the sovereign God, our Father. Proverbs 21:1 speaks to the same idea when Solomon writes that *"The king's heart is like channels of water in the hands of the Lord; he turns it wherever he wishes."* Paul recognizes the dilemma, but trusts in God's sovereign will. He knows what he would like to choose, but it's not his choice.

We as believers are at the will of the Father. The best model of this, and truly the best model of all things, is Christ. He's the perfect picture of submission. And as he submits to the Father's will, he clearly submits to the Father's will in life and in death. Paul is reflecting Christ in this and we're to do the same. So, in light of a will-centered death, we're to remember, first, that our life is not our own. We were bought at a price, just as we saw in Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 6:20. We were encouraged. *"Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation"* (2 Corinthians 5:18). The word *reconcile*, in the original is an old word for exchanging coins. It denotes to change or exchange, especially money, then of individuals to change from enmity to friendship, to reconcile. *"For while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life"* (Romans 5:10). We were exchanged; we were also redeemed. Ephesians 1:7: *"In him we have our redemption through his blood, for the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to his riches of his grace."* We were exchanged; we were redeemed; we should live differently. Romans 12: 1 and 2: *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, on account of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what is the good, pleasing and perfect will of God."*

And looking at a will-centered death, our death is one in which we can rejoice because we're in the hands of a righteous and sovereign God. We are His subjects, His servants, and His adopted sons and daughters. If you've had the privilege of sitting under Pastor Matt's teaching when he does his parenting class, you've heard him speak about life and death. He'll remind you how children see their parents living and how they will learn from them. They will learn from how you respond to things. They will learn how from how you

endure struggles from how you endure trials. They'll mimic you in so many ways, but one thing that Matt reminds parents is something which much of the world overlooks. He will tell you that one of the best things you can show your children is how to die well. It's a little bit heavy to think through. Living with loss is not easy. But living and dying in light of God's glory is a beautiful thing. Funerals can be hard. But how much greater is it when we can rejoice in the life of a loved one who is no longer fighting in this fallen world but rejoicing at the feet of Christ. Steve Lawson says, "In light of this, as Christians, you and I must see death in this light. The world does not because it cannot. It must deny death and seek to ignore it, or despair in death and be crushed by the reality of it. We can live with liberating knowledge that the best day of this life will be the last one. The grave is not sovereign, but only a servant to bring us to Christ." A will-centered death remembers that our life is not our own.

Secondly, a will-centered death is marked by joy, by hope, and by courage. Just as we see Paul's living for Christ marked by the same characteristics, we can approach death with an equivalent boldness. Paul's joy isn't determined or deterred by life and death. On the contrary, he rejoices regardless of the outcome. Paul speaks of his desire to leave this life and depart and be with Christ. The word use here means for something to be loose, like a ship loose from its moorings or a prisoner free from bonds. Paul desires to be free from the burdens of this life. But ultimately, he submits to God. He submits whether he lives or dies.

What is joy in death? Joy in death is exactly we talked about earlier. I'll repeat the definition of biblical joy I gave you: true biblical joy is not happiness but is the hope, comfort, and conviction that comes from the grace of God in the competence of our salvation. Joy is not driven by one's circumstances, but rather by one's position, which is granted by an unchanging, unwavering, and sovereign heavenly Father. With the joy we have in Christ, there is no true sorrow in our death. Sickness and pain are hard. But as believers, we can have joy in death. For the world, there is no joy as it's a terrible end. But for the believer, we depart this fallen world to be with the object of our affection, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Where the world weeps, we can rejoice. Now, don't get me wrong, there is sadness in death. But that sadness is for those who are left here on earth without the ones we love. If the person you've lost is a believer, we'll grieve their death

and there is sorrow in that separation. If you've ultimately lost a loved one, there is grief and sadness but, ultimately, if they're a believer in Jesus Christ, and if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, we have joy.

Now, we can have joy because we have hope. We have that unwavering expectation that we will be with our Savior when we die. We have confidence that when our eyes close, they will open up in glory. It isn't something like you're planning a trip to Orlando. If you're planning to go to Orlando, you buy a plane ticket to Orlando, you get on a plane that says it's going to Orlando, and the whole time you really hope you're gonna land in Orlando. But you kind of wonder, wonder if you end up in Chicago instead. There's none of that in biblical hope. There's a solid, unwavering confidence that you will be redeemed as believers will be with our Savior. As much confidence as we put in a pilot to safely get us to our destination, we have a greater promise in the unfailing strength and sovereignty of God. He will not fail, He will not make mistakes, and there's no shadow of doubt within His promises. If we are faithful in how we study God's Word, and we constantly see His faithfulness over and over and over again, it only serves to strengthen the hope we can have in Him. This is the hope we have in a will-centered death.

Courage is the final thing we can have in a will-centered death. This courage comes from a peace we have in Christ. It's directly tied to our joy and to our hope, the courage we have in light of who God is, what He has said, and what He has done. The courage doesn't come from us or anything we can do. We often want to trust in our own strength. That confidence in ourselves will not produce courage in death. No matter how strong you are, you can't save yourself. All is done in God's infinite strength. The courage we have is determined by the strength of our God. Our courage is rooted in how God is, who backs us and who holds us in His hand. We can stand strongly in death as we know to whom we belong. Our joy in Christ and hope and assurance in Him determines the courage we can have.

Reminds me of a song we sang today—I was so thankful for Ben in singing “Christ, Our Hope In Life And Death”. It fits so beautifully into what we were hearing today, what we read today, I want to read a few portions of that song and remind you of what we sang today. You have it in front of you on your song sheet. “What is our hope in life and death?/

Christ alone, Christ alone/ What is our only confidence?/ That our souls belong to him belong/ Who holds our days within his hand?/ What comes apart from his command?/ And what will keep us to the end?/ The love of Christ in which we stand". Continues on: "Who holds our faith when fears arise?/ Who stands above the stormy trial?/ Who sends the waves that bring us nigh/ onto the shore, the rock of Christ?" And the chorus, "O sing hallelujah!/ Our hope springs eternal/ O sing hallelujah!/ Now and ever we confess/ Christ, our hope in life and death." What joy we have in knowing that and singing that we have hope in Christ. As believers in Jesus Christ, we are called to be like him. We're called to be called to Christ's likeness. We are called, in life or in death, conformed to the image of Christ, and to live or die in light of His perfect will. A will-centered death is marked by joy, hope, and courage.

As we come to close today, I can't help but wonder what drives our lives. What drives your life? What's the thing that pulls your worship and focus? There is no such thing as someone who doesn't worship anything. Tara and I once got to hear Gandhi's grandson speak. He was a very peaceful man and spoke about peace. And there was a Q&A at the end of when he was speaking, and it was fascinating. I don't know that he was a believer and I'm actually quite confident he's not. But during the Q&A, someone stood up and at their microphone said, "Now, I'm an atheist but—" And Arun Gandhi stopped him and said, "No, you're not." And the guy said, "No, I am an atheist." And Gandhi said, "No, you're not. You're not an atheist. There's no such thing." He's like, "No, I'm pretty sure I'm an atheist." He said, "No, you're worshiper. You worship something. You believe in a god. Your god might be your cell phone. Your god might be your family. You're worshipping something because you're designed for worship, but you're not an atheist."

So what are we worshipping? What is it that's pulling your worship and focus? The world can even recognize that they're worshipping something. Even when you think of a fan, it comes from the word *fanatic*. You're following passionately after something? If you had one of those novelty T-shirts from my introduction, what would it say? Would it say Christ is life? And all the rest is just details? That's great, if you have one of those. I'm not endorsing that T-shirt. If you want to get one, that's great. But what would your life show? Is that what our life would show, that Christ is life? Do we produce the fruit which would authenticate that claim? Lastly, as I depart from this pulpit, I ask that you take time to

meditate on God's word, chew on this text. Go back, read Philippians 18 to 23. Read Acts 16. Spend time reading. Spend time writing out God's Word. Spend time memorizing God's Word. Don't walk away and forget the powerful truth of God's Word. Engage people; talk to people. Have courage. Be marked by the consumption of, the love of, God's Word and the love of the gospel. Be people who are following passionately after Christ.

Let's pray.

Gracious God, we thank You for your mercy. We thank you for your grace. We thank you for how you bless us, and that even though we deserve nothing but wrath, you gave your son for us. Lord, we thank you that you've adopted us as sons and daughters, and that we might have our hope and joy and courage in you. Lord, work in our hearts. Give us a thirst for your Word. Don't let that thirst be quenched, Lord, until we are seeing you face to face. Lord, help us to be a people marked by your Word, that people know us as people of your book, that we hear Your Word because we're reading it Lord, we know your Word. We hear your voice because we're reading it, Lord, we know it, and it's written on our hearts. Lord, help us to be defined by your Word. Help us to be defined as people are passionately for Assuming you regardless of our circumstance, regardless of what the world puts in front of us. Lord, we praise you that, in light of life and death, we are secure in your sovereign hands. Bless us, Lord, as we go from this place, that all we say and do would mark us as your people. We pray all this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.