

Philippians 1:21

What happens when people truly **believe** in a cause? We find them **dedicating** their **time**, and **efforts**, and **resources** to **further** that cause. Maybe it's the war against **terrorism**, so they join the military. Maybe it's feeding the **hungry**, so they actively support and volunteer at their local food pantry or soup kitchen. Maybe it's helping kids who don't have a solid example to follow at home, so they get involved in **mentoring** as a big **brother** or big **sister**. In **all** of these instances, they know their involvement isn't going to be **cheap** or **easy** - but they do it **anyway**. They do it because it is **important** - it's a **priority** for them. They do it because it seems like the **right thing** to do. They do it because they truly believe that what they are doing is going to make a **difference** - it's going to make things **better**.

What's the cause that **you** believe in? What is **worth** a big investment of your **time**, and **efforts**, and **resources**? What is your real **passion** - your **reason** for **living**? For many people it's **family** and **friends**, or **health** and **wealth**. For others it's **power** and **prestige**. And for still others it's **sports** and **entertainment**. While we may be interested in a **variety** of different causes, for the **Christian**, there is one **over-riding** cause that permeates **everything** we do in life. It is the **reason** God **put** us here on the earth. Paul said it well in the words of our text, "*For me to live is **Christ**, and to die is **gain**.*" Paul points us **above** and **beyond** all the **lesser** causes of this life to **A Higher Purpose For Life And Death**.

Let's look at what that actually **meant** for **Paul**. His life as a Christian didn't bring him prosperity and wealth, safety and security, or rest and relaxation. Instead, it brought just the **opposite**. He wrote to the Corinthians, "*I have **worked much harder**, been **in prison** more frequently, been **flogged** more severely, and been exposed to **death** again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty **lashes** minus one. Three times I was **beaten** with rods, once I was **stoned**, three times I was **shipwrecked**, I spent a night and a day in the **open sea**, I have been constantly on the **move**. I have been in **danger** from rivers, in **danger** from bandits, in **danger** from my own countrymen, in **danger** from Gentiles; in **danger** in the city, in **danger** in the country, in **danger** at sea; and in **danger** from false brothers. I have **labored** and **toiled** and have often gone **without sleep**; I have known **hunger** and **thirst** and have often gone **without food**; I have been **cold** and **naked**. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my **concern** for all the churches.*" Now, as I read those words I know you were probably all thinking,

“**That’s** the kind of life **I want**. **Paul’s** cause is the kind of cause **I want** to be involved with.”

I don’t think so. We aren’t attracted to **pain**, and **suffering**, and **insecurity**, and lack of **safety**. Those are things we try to **avoid**. And when those situations become **unavoidable**, and we are **faced** with them in life, we **aren’t happy** about them - and we don’t usually **thank God** for sending them to us. But **Paul** did - and Paul had it **right**. He had figured out what **stumps** so many people for such a **long** time. He had figured out what life is **really** all about. It’s **not** about being **happy**, and **comfortable**, and **rich**, and **famous**. It’s **not** about what **we** like, or about what **we** want. It’s not about **us** being in **control**. It’s about our **Savior** and **His plans** for us. **Everything** in our lives needs to **fit in** with those plans. Jesus helps us to **do** that. He makes the **plans** for our lives, and through His holy Word, He also provides us with the **direction** we need to **follow** His plans in everything we do.

Many people **drift** through life **without** a purpose, and **drifting** isn’t **good**. Drifting takes us wherever the wind blows us - usually **off course**. The godless culture of our world is like the **wind**, and it has the potential to blow us every which way - to **negatively influence** our thoughts, and words, and actions - to get us **off course**. Is it possible that some of **us** are just **drifting** through life? As we consider the countless events of our daily lives, shouldn’t we be asking, “**Why** am I **doing** this?” “For **whom** am I doing this?” “What is the **real purpose** for my life?” If we’re **not** asking those questions, we may very well be headed in the wrong direction. We may be living our lives out of selfish **pride**, as we strive to raise the standard of our lives **above** the lives of others. Or, we may be living our lives out of **duty** in order to carry out the **responsibilities** we feel toward **others**. What we need to realize is that the **real purpose** of our lives on the earth is **not** to accomplish something for **ourselves**, or to take care of **others**. Our purpose in life is to give **glory** to the Almighty **God** - the God who **made** us, the God who **redeemed** us, the God who **sanctifies** us.

We have to get our lives back **on course** - back on **God’s** course - by **obeying** what He wants us to do. And in order to **do** that, we’re going to need constant **guidance** and **direction** from Him. When we **have** that guidance and **use** it, then we will truly be able to **glorify God** in our **living**. For example, then we can drive the **speed limit**, not because the state patrol might have a speed trap set up a mile down the freeway - but because driving the speed limit gives **glory to**

God. Then we can love our **husband** or **wife**, not because they **deserve** to be loved or because they are so loving to **us** - but because loving our spouse gives **glory to God**. Then we can **give generously** to the work of the Church, not because the Church **needs** it or because they aren't meeting their **budget** - but because giving generously to the work of the Church gives **glory to God**. Do you see what I'm getting at here? **Everything** which we do in life - within our **family**, within our **community**, within our **congregation** - **everything** needs to be done **for the glory of God**. There is no other purpose which matters. That's what Paul meant when he said, "*For me to live is Christ.*"

But there is **more**, because Paul **also** said, "*And (for me) to die is gain.*" So, what does **that** mean? How is **death** a gain? We generally try to **hang on** to life, and to **avoid** death, because for **us**, death is the great **unknown**. We don't know how it **works** - we don't know how it **feels** - we've never **been there** before. But again, none of those things **matter**, because our death gives **glory to God**. It's part of His eternal **plan**. As Christians, we aren't **afraid** to die, because **Jesus Himself** has already **been there**. **He** knows how death **works** - **He** knows how death **feels**. And as King David wrote in Psalm 23, "*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me.*" As Christians, we are willing to venture **into** that great unknown **whenever** the Lord says it is our time to **leave** this earthly life, because we know that our Savior will walk **with us**, and will lead us **safely** to our home in **heaven**. That is ultimately why Paul can say, "*(For me) to die is gain.*"

Jesus **knew** that too, and that's why He made **our salvation** the **highest** priority in His life. He **did** what we could **not do** for ourselves. He **purchased** and **won** us from sin, death, and the power of the devil with His holy, precious **blood**; and with His innocent **suffering** and **death**. Jesus set the perfect **example** for us - the example of using **all** the resources which God has given to accomplish **God's** purposes - the example of following **God's path**, even if it leads to persecution, pain, rejection, and scorn - the example of being willing to bear **all** those things and even **death on a cross**, in order to bring **glory to God**.

God's glory is what our life, and the earth, and all of creation is all about. To glorify God is the **highest purpose** in life. Putting God **first**, enables us to live for Christ in our **relationships**. Putting God **first** enables us to live for Christ, using our **resources** of time, talent, and treasure, in the way God **intended** them to be used. And putting God **first** enables us to **rejoice** over the great things God has

done for us. That's **exciting**, and it is a genuine cause for **celebration**.

Dear friends, let's **focus** on the fact that God has made us **who we are**, and He has given us **what we have**, only so we can give glory to **Him**. That will keep us from being **distracted** by all the things in life which are **not important**. It will help us to keep our **priorities** straight when there are multiple demands on our time. And it will require us to rely entirely on **God's guidance**, recognizing we can't do it on our own. We have **A Higher Purpose For Living And Dying**. For us, to live is **Christ**, and to die is **gain**. Amen.