

“Life Worth Living”  
Philippians 1:12-14, 19-30  
September 24, 2017

When I was in my early 20s on active duty with the Army, doing my entry level schooling that was designed to prepare me to lead soldiers in my first assignment, there was a man from an investment firm at one of our classes who invited our group to come to a free dinner at a nice hotel to hear how if we started investing our money properly at the beginning of our military careers, we would be able to retire in our mid-40s not only with our military pension, but also with income from investments made with this company. Well this sounded interesting, plus there was a free dinner which is truly what got our attention, so a group of us decided to attend.

As we listened to this presentation, we were encouraged to imagine what life would be like in our 40s being able to do anything we wanted, without any schedules or demands or a boss telling us what to do, and not having to worry about money. “Imagine being able to play golf or to relax at the pool at the officers’ club, or traveling around the country without having to worry about money. Invest your money with us and we will help you meet that goal.” It sounded exciting, but there was one thing that a group of us found a little unusual. The guys who were doing the presentation were all retired Army officers, but they all appeared to be in their 50s or 60s, so if this was such a great thing or if investing with this company really would enable you to have financial security in your 40s, why were these guys still working fulltime? Privately a few of them told us that they did retire in their late 40s, but after a few years they were bored and they didn’t feel like their life had a purpose anymore. While they were all in their late 50s and early 60s, they told us they didn’t have any plans to retire again because they all enjoyed working for this company. As a result no one in our group decided to invest money with them, because at age 22 we didn’t have money to invest and we weren’t really thinking about retirement. We had our whole lives in front of us. There were many things we wanted to do and many goals we wanted to achieve before we even started thinking about retirement.

So there must be a better goal in life than to simply earn a lot of money and retire young. And there is. Paul said in our second lesson for today, “I want to live with Christ! I want to live for Christ!” What’s interesting is that Paul said this at a very difficult time in his life. He was in chains under house arrest in Rome for preaching about Jesus and was tired of being treated like a criminal. He was ready to be done with everything when he said in verses 21-23, “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.”

It wasn’t unusual for those serving prison sentences in those days to desire death rather than go on living. I’m sure the conditions were probably pretty bad in prisons and I can’t imagine that inmates had any particular rights, but Paul sees the value in continuing to live, because he believes he could be of service to others. On the other hand, he also knew that death would bring him in contact with Jesus, which was “far better.” That’s why he said, “to die is gain.”

But don’t we usually think of dying as losing? When someone dies of cancer we often say, “Bob lost the battle.” That’s what the disciples thought when Jesus died on the cross. They thought He had lost the battle against His enemies and all their hopes that He was the promised Savior were lost. But Jesus’ death was actually a great victory for humankind. Jesus took the full brunt of God’s anger over the world’s sins on Himself as He endured our punishment of death on the cross. Yes, Jesus died, but in doing so He redirected God’s anger over your sins and my sins to Himself, and secured forgiveness and eternal life in heaven for all people. We know this is true, because Jesus rose from the dead to explain to His disciples what He had accomplished – not just victory over sin, but victory over death as well.

Again, that’s why Paul said that dying is gain. But this is only true for those who want to live with Christ, for without Jesus we have no forgiveness, and death won’t bring gain, but increased pain as we’ll have to stand before our holy God without Jesus as our go-between. Just think of how it hurts your hands if you accidentally touch a hot pan in the oven without oven mitts. That’s only slightly what it will be like on Judgment Day and for the rest of eternity without Jesus covering our dirty, sin-filled bodies.

So what is your goal in life? Is it to make a lot of money and retire young? Well, there’s nothing wrong with that, but where does Jesus fit into those plans or any plans for your future? Will Jesus be an active part of

your life today and every day or will you push Him to the back of your life, like a book that you're always meaning to read, but never get around to it?

Whenever parents bring their children here for baptism, it is a wonderful reminder that our minds are not to be on earthly things, but on heavenly matters. When a child is baptized, he or she immediately become members of God's family – a citizen of heaven. Parents, then, have some serious work ahead of them as they are to teach their child what it means to live with Christ. Wanting to live with Christ in heaven someday means showing your child how to live with Him now. How do you do that? By bringing your child or children here for worship, by bringing them to Sunday School or Family Night, and by opening your Bible at home and reading what Jesus has done for you. Make these things a regular part of your family routine.

Now, some of you might be thinking, "Living with Christ has been my goal for a long time. I'm ready. So what's taking so long for Jesus to bring me to be with Him in heaven?" Paul reminds us that there is a second part to the goal of living with Christ and that is living for Christ. Let me read for you again verses 23-26, "My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again."

Paul knew that while it was his goal to live with Christ, it was also his goal to live for Him. But how do you live for someone you can't see? You live for Christ by serving the people around you who you can see. That's why Paul was eager to remain alive so he could continue to encourage the Christians in Philippi in their walk with Jesus. That should be every Christian's goal, no matter how young or old we may be.

So how do you think you're doing when it comes to living with Christ and for Christ? Sometimes I think Christians treat life like it's just a big airport waiting area. Have you ever noticed what most people are doing when they are waiting to board their plane at the airport? They are checking text messages, reading or sending emails, talking on the phone, working on their computer, eating a little food, or reading a book. In other words, everyone is just doing their own thing, waiting for the plane to show up so they can get on it and go elsewhere, as if the boarding gate is just a place to be endured.

It's easy to treat life that way as a Christian. Sometimes it might feel like we are just marking time with our busy schedules or daily routines, waiting for Jesus to take us to heaven. But since we are all here today it means that Jesus still has more for us to do. Living for Christ means actively looking out for the interests of others and putting their needs first. That's certainly not the airport boarding gate mentality where you are only looking out for yourself. God wants us to notice others. Are they down? Then encourage them, pray for them, email them, or send them a note. It can mean so much, not just for the other person, but for you too as it gives your life purpose and meaning. This is the benefit of living for Christ.

The guys who were trying to encourage me to invest my money with their company when I was 22 years-old wanted me to believe that retiring in my mid-40s was the way to happiness. But the question those men ended up asking in their own lives was even if you do succeed in achieving your goal of retiring in your mid-40s, what then? Paul gives us a much better goal in our text – live with Christ and for Christ. That may not make your life easier; it certainly did not for Paul as he ended up in prison for being a Christian, but someday life will be much better as Jesus will bring all of us who have faith in Him to live with Him forever.