

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (17-3-1991 Cleland Baptist Church)

Philippians 1:21

Additional Bible Reading: John 15:1-17

Introduction

This is one of the sublimest statements of the New Testament. We hardly dare to speak these words, and fear that our expounding them will be inadequate and insensitive. They are so delicate, pure and sublime, and we have such rough hands. Paul is stating a fact, yet also posing a challenge. We should be able to echo his words. There are no special elite Christians who can say these words, and lesser Christians who cannot, no special order of the saints.

We come face to face with the standard of judgment for our own lives. What does life mean to me? What is it all about? One of the tragedies of life is that many men and women never think about these things, never consider the purpose of their lives. Their's is an animal existence only, no philosophy whatsoever. But the Christian should be concerned about it, and be able to give a very clear answer.

Paul is clear about his stance. In life or death, Christ was everything to him. He would prefer to die, but if he lived for another 20 years, his life would mean Christ all the time. If he died, it would still mean Christ. Living or dying, it was all the same. Christ was the secret of it all.

The question is, can we say the same thing? This question touches on the vital distinction between the Christian and the non-Christian.

What is life? Some answers

Epicureans would say, let us eat, drink and be merry. Life is just pleasure – one pleasure after another. In Paul's day, as today, people would leave the provinces to go and live in big cities because they wanted their full of life. They pitied those left behind.

Stoics think life is something to be endured. They do not have a perpetual grin on their faces. They are intelligent enough to know that everything is not wonderful. They see harshness, suffering and wretchedness. Life involves putting up with it, controlling self, holding on through the battle, having a stiff upper lip.

The cynic thinks life is meaningless. There is no use in any of it, a lot of nonsense only, worthy of a sneer.

The humanist thinks life is about looking for opportunities to do good, improving the world and uplifting society.

Others seek eminence from life. They strive to be leaders in society, to amass great fortune, reputation for scholarship, leadership of profession, leaders of fashion, the best dressed, the talk of the town, earning the esteem and respect which such eminence brings.

The average man just lives for himself – the empty social round, a good time, the fortunes of his favourite football team, family, work, home, loved ones. These things become the main thing in life – and when he loses them, life and the world collapses. He thinks religion in just an appendage for special occasions.

Then there are “religious” people, who are not Christians, but are concerned with religious duties and practices – going to church, being involved in clubs and societies, but nothing else. When illness comes, or old age, nothing is left, only memories.

In so far as people think at all, these are the things which life means. This is what occupies their thoughts, ambitions, money and waking hours. They never get beyond or above these things. This is what it is all about.

### What is life? The Christian answer

Now on the other side from all these viewpoints stands Paul, and not only Paul but the genuine Christian profession from every age. Life is Christ. Without Him, life is pointless and meaningless. There is no part of our lives where Christ is omitted, no area where He is excluded and which is marked “private”. We are to have the **mind of Christ** (1 Corinthians 2:16), **do everything through Him** (Philippians 4:13), things are to be done **unto Christ** (Ephesians 6:5, AV), **that we may know Him** (1 John 5:20).

This is true of the genuine believer in every age, despite their waywardness, lapses and failures. This must be our aim and concern. Samuel Rutherford spoke of falling asleep with Christ, as a pillow, and awakening in Christ. His heart was not his own, for Jesus had run away with it to heaven. “One smile of Christ’s face is near to me as a kingdom” [writing unclear].

For the Christian there are three essentials. Firstly, he has received new life in Christ. He was spiritually dead, dead to God and Christ, hating the name of Christ, a slave to sin, under the wrath of God. But at the Cross he found forgiveness, and cast himself on Christ to be saved. “Life for a look at the crucified one.” He became aware of the Holy Spirit breathing new life into his soul, and he can say, “Christ lives in me”, “Christ dwells in my heart by faith.”

Through faith he has union with Christ. He could not manufacture it, or inherit it from parents, or receive it through sacraments and religion. Christ is known through faith alone. He is the life giver. The heart was dead and empty before, and he just existed, but now he is alive. This new life is vital if we are talking about being a Christian. So often (c.f. papers and TV) the Christian life is portrayed as doing your best, trying to be better, kind and forgiving to others. That is part of it, but beyond that it means new life in Christ. That is essential if we are going to do better.

We have no spiritual life apart from Christ, only mere existence and mere religion. But this is only the beginning. He keeps on, day by day, empowering this new life. We feed on Him, are nourished by Him, and so our spiritual life grows and matures. He sustains us in adversity, He transforms and strengthens. He satisfies us in all circumstances, and we learn to be content in Him. Christ satisfies our intellect, our

needs, and our feelings. Christ is all in all. Every demand I may make of life is satisfied in Him.

For the Christian, Christ is always in control. He means everything to the believer. In Christ there is fullness of blessing, power, joy, peace and grace. The more we despair of ourselves, and own our resources, the more we live in Him. The less we scrape the barrels of our own resources, and live in dependence on Him, the more He fills us with Himself.

The second essential thing about the Christian life is that it is a Christ-controlled life. Our personality and possessions are under His control. We are not our own for we have been **bought at a price** (1 Corinthians 6:20). Intellectually, He controls our reading and our thinking. Emotionally, He controls our feelings and affections. Volitionally, where the battle rages, when we give, serve, work, go to any lengths, He will not let go control of our life.

The Christ controlled life is so different from that of folks around. We do not cringe and fawn to others. We do not bow to “Everybody else does it”, “Is it fashionable?”, “Will it make me popular?”, “Will it keep me from criticism?”. Instead, the Christian thinks, “What does God want me to do?”, “Is it right?”, “Is it biblical?”. Being controlled by Christ gives us the courage to do right, whatever malice or slander may come our way.

Thirdly, the Christian life is essentially a Christ-magnifying life. We are not in the business to attract attention to ourselves, our achievements, cleverness, importance and possessions. Our concern is to magnify Christ, by life or death. This is the passion undergirding all. Drawing attention to Him, lifting Him up, pointing to Him. He is the motive behind all our letters, journeys, sermons, and conversations. This motivation transforms everything – there is never a dull or aimless day. Every trial is a chance to uplift Christ.

Is that us? Do we manipulate conversations to draw attention to ourselves, or to God? Would we stoop to criticism or depreciation of others in order to justify ourselves? Are we not sometimes proud of our humility? Do we truly give God the glory due to His name? **O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together** (Psalm 34:3).

In summary, **For me to live is Christ**. Forgiveness and spiritual life is received from Christ. Henceforth I am controlled by Christ, and I live to for His honour and glory. Christ is the secret of all. Without Him, life would collapse and become meaningless.

### Conclusion

Can we honestly say that living means Christ? Is that true of us? Imagine if every Christian could truthfully say that, what an effect it would have on the church and therefore the world. When people can truly say this, they really count in the world. Consumed by passion for the Lord, their lives are radiant, and the whole world knows there is a difference.

What do we think about the most? What are our hearts set on? What are our real interests? Is Christ really in the centre? When we consider the purpose of life, is Christ the real motivation behind it all? Sometimes we are so anxious for blessings that we forget the blesser. Is the real passion of our lives orthodoxy, church work and activity, or is Christ the centre of it all? Count Zinzendorf, the Moravian leader who helped John Wesley before and after his conversion, said, "I have one passion – it is He, and He alone."

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal Him to you. Pray for this. Spend time with this. Let it absorb you. Do all you can to get to know Him better. Try this – get a pen and paper, and write down "For me to live is..." Stop. Look up to God and ask Him to make you true. Then fill in the paper. What will you write? Be honest. Put it down in black and white – family? Interests? Business? Success? Standing? Tell the Lord things have gone wrong, and confess that your relationship with Him has taken back seat. Grasp the pen and put a line straight through it. Write in its place "Christ". Do it before God. If you are real, He will take you at your word and will bless you.