

To Live Is Christ

TRANSCRIPT (AUTO-GENERATED)

If you've ever done any photography, you'll appreciate how important focus is. Anyone done a bit of photography? Not too many people, but a few of us.

Often we do it these days with a phone, don't we? And we just put it there and press on the part that we want to have in focus. But those of us who have been into photography for a while would remember single lens reflex cameras, anybody with me?

Lots of us. And that time, you had to use a focus ring and you had to sort of work out which part of the scene am I going to draw out and put it into focus so that it's sharply the thing that my attention is drawn to.

Everything else, if you have a good lens that lets light into the sensor, you're sometimes able to create in the background, what's called bokeh. And it's sort of mushy, smudgy, beautiful, unclear stuff in the background like this little flower.

And that's the essence of good portrait photography. You grab something and say, give all your attention to this. Philippians 1 12 to 26 is all about what is most important in life to focus on.

There are some things in our lives that we should allow to be a little bit more mushy and smudgy and not clearly in our focus every day. And there are other things like the Gospel that should be absolutely in clear focus.

So morning and night, different sermons will hopefully, Lord willing, look at 13 different talks in the Book of Philippians. And tonight's message is entitled Gospel Focus. Have you ever experienced what you might call unbridled passion for Christ?

It's a genuine question. Has it been, I mean, you got to be a Christian first. I think a lot of us are here.

Maybe you've been a Christian for a little while. Is there a time, a season in your life you can think back to, where you would say, yeah, look, I was pretty full on. You know, you come up with a word that you might say.

Anybody know what I'm talking about? There's a time when you look back and go, yeah, maybe I would call that unbridled passion where Christ seems to be more in focus. The other stuff of life, it was easier maybe for it to become less clear.

Sometimes, often, it's when you're a young adult, when you're a bit more unincumbent as it were, and it's like life is before you, but Christianity is all that matters.

I've mentioned this before, but I grew up in a Christian home, and when I was nearly turning 20, end of my 19th year of being, my 20th year, being 19, God really grabbed hold of me, and my life was changed, and it was in a community of people, and so

I was affected by the zeal of this community. And I was handed a book, a book called Vanya. Anyone ever read, I've got a picture of it there, I think. Anyone read the book Vanya?

No one? It's a great book to read. It changed my life.

I had never read someone, he was a young Russian soldier who ends up being martyred for his faith, but it struck me as a sort of a long-term Christian kid. Wow, this Christianity is meant to arrest you, it's meant to grab hold of you.

And Vanya, the biography of Vanya is built around Philippians 1.21, which is in the passage we're looking at tonight. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

All week I've been thinking, what does that even mean? What does it mean? Whatever it means, it sounds like focus.

It sounds like focus to me. Focus on Christ. Paul is in Rome and he's in jail, and he's realised whether he lives, cause you know, life and death are right before him.

It's like, if I live, it's gonna be about, continue to be about the proclamation of this incredible story, that God has become human in his son, Jesus Christ, lived a perfect life, and he has died once and for all for the sin of the world, and he has

risen from the dead, and I'm telling the whole world. He was walking on that road to Damascus, and Jesus turned up, and there was a revelation of the risen Christ, and Saul's name was changed to Paul, and that's what he is saying again to the

Philippians. If I get to live another day, it's about Christ, and you know what? I may die, but if I die, it's gain. I get to go and be with Christ.

It's a bit of an all-in situation, isn't it? This line, for to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. I mentioned that we were surrounded by some zealous people.

It was a zealous community at which we were probably affected by what I would call holiness pentecostalism, if that means anything for you. And the people we were reading about. So it all pushed you down a path of zealot, holiness.

So when Leanne and I got married in 92, we didn't buy a TV. That was the sort of community it was in. No one told us not to buy a TV, but it was like, why would we have a TV?

We want to live for Christ and to live is Christ and to die is gain. So we didn't have a TV for the first few years of our marriage. And we started fasting, because that was what you did if you were a zealot.

And so I was sort of one of the zealots, and I love to fast. And so we do multiple fasts. And I was talking about a camp in Geringong.

This is a different camp. But one of the camps, the surf camps we ran, I wasn't running it. I was giving one of the many talks in this week-long camp.

I decided to fast 10 days for this one talk. That's a bit of a zealot, isn't it? I don't say that as pride.

I'm really just saying it as I grapple with, what does it mean now as a 52-year-old man to live that out, to live as Christ and to die as gain. When I was 22 and fasting 10 days, not partial fasting, no food at all for 10 days.

There's a commitment in that. So when you turn up to do that talk at the camp, I've got to say you focused. One of the quotes that we used to love was this quote called, The Fellowship of the Unashamed.

I'm gonna read it for you. And it's, I believe it's the last thing a Rwandan pastor wrote before he lost his life. Now, this morning was a humorous sermon.

If you want a humorous sermon, you should look it up online. This one's less humorous, but good. But good, worth us sitting in.

So this is a Rwandan pastor the night before he was martyred. And he wrote this, I am part of the fellowship of the unashamed. The die has been cast.

I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I am a disciple of Jesus Christ.

I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away or be still. My past is redeemed. My present makes sense and my future is secure.

I am finished and done with low living, sight walking, small planning, smooth knees, colorless dreams, chintzy giving and dwarfed goals. I no longer need preeminence, prosperity, position, promotions, plaudits or popularity.

I now live by presence, lean by faith, love by patience, lift by prayer and labor by power. My pace is set. My gate is fast.

My goal is heaven. My road is narrow. My way is rough.

My companions few. My guide is reliable. My mission is clear.

I cannot be bought, compromised, deterred, lured away, turned back, diluted or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice. Hesitate in the presence of adversity.

Negotiate at the table of the enemy. Ponder at the pool of popularity or meander in the maze of mediocrity. I'm a disciple of Jesus Christ.

I must go until heaven returns. Give until I drop. Preach until all know.

And work until he comes. And when he comes to get his own, he will have no problem recognizing me. My colors will be clear.

That's talking about an all in faith, isn't it? But my question is, is that good?

Is that good?

Where's rest? It's a genuine question. Where's balance?

Heroism, which that is, to be a martyr is to be a hero, for sure. It often in Christianity produces pride, judgmentalism. I'm just reflecting on my own life, being a zealot, coming out of this.

Yet, I hold intention that now is, I hope, more mature than the 22 year old version of myself.

I look back and think, you know, you had a lot of pride in that fasting and all that, but you can't not hear that, the testimony of the resolutions of a man before he dies and not be inspired a little bit, right?

So, I feel like tonight, there's a tension. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. What does that even mean for us?

Can we sit in the challenge of it and not dilute it by saying, ah, it's not very balanced.

It's not balanced.

But so much of scripture is not balanced. How do we live a Philippians 1.21 life and die a Philippians 1.21 death? I think there's one word, focus.

If you added another word that's very important, it would be gospel focus. Gospel focus. This is a repeat of what I said in the morning.

We plan out our sermon series basically the year ahead, and we were going to do 6260 from the beginning of the year. Lord willing, we still get to do it.

And what we had planned on preaching was a 10-week series looking from Matthew all the way through to Revelation and like an overview of the New Testament.

And so a month ago, I came to be preparing that and I feel guilty to say it, but I just wasn't inspired much at all about doing that sort of broad overview. Because I was thinking we did that in the beginning of the year with Luke Axe.

And I just felt honestly prompted by the Lord away from that and more towards Philippians. And then, of course, I was looking at Axe 16, which Hamish and the crew went through.

It's interesting that when Paul first went to Philippi, Chapter 16, verse 6, they were traveling through the region of Frigia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia.

And when they came to the border of Misia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to go there. I don't know what that means. Is the flaming sword or just like I had a hunch?

It's not the right thing to do. Go over there. So he goes over to Macedonia, to Philippi, and they begin this church, which as I said this morning, I think is Paul's favorite church in the whole New Testament, Philippi.

It's a cracking church. So it might sound cheeky to say, but I believe God has done that to me in my role as a pastor and preparing a lot of the preaching. So I'm excited.

I feel like God said, you know what? We'll do 60 to 60 as an overview, but I want you guys to hang out in the Philippians and we'll see what God has for us. So Philippi was a Roman colony in ancient Macedonia.

It was the first church Paul planted in Eastern Europe. And it was on his first missionary journey. Philippi was full.

You might know this, but I'll just repeat it again. Philippi was full of old Roman soldiers. They sort of got land there.

It was like part of their retirement package. So to say that they were uber patriotic in Philippi is an understatement.

So it probably accounts for some of the fierce persecution when a new crowd come in and start talking about someone else who is Lord, not Caesar, not the Emperor, who is the King of Kings.

So Philippi is very much Roman, and Paul is in Rome under house arrest because he's left Philippi. It's been established and growing.

He's ended up moving around the Mediterranean, ends up in Rome on house arrest, and a guy called Epaphroditus brings a generous gift from the church at Philippi to Paul, and Paul has sent Epaphroditus back with this letter, which is in our hands,

called the letter to the Philippians. How do we live out Philippians 1.21? For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain. I think first of all, we see we live with gospel focused amidst suffering.

That's how you do it. You got to work out how to live with gospel focus amidst suffering if we're going to do this Philippians 1.21.

So Paul writes in verse 12, I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel.

So he's in prison, but he wants them to know, as a result of me being in prison, it's become clear throughout the whole palace garden and to everyone else, that I'm in chains for Christ.

Because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

He's learned a way in the midst of suffering and things not working out the way that he thought they would. He's beaten with rods.

He's learned how to turn the focus ring and let the suffering go into the smudgy boker and just see what Christ is on about. We've talked about this before. It's really called reframing, seeing what God is up to.

The gospel, if we were to see gospel focus in the midst of suffering, you would look at the gospel and you'd see suffering in the gospel.

Do you ever stop and just think, the gospel, which is this awesome truth that we should be on about, suffering is right in the middle of it. There's God mutilated on a cross in a human form, hanging there, dying for the sin of the world.

That's suffering par excellence. But at the same time, supernaturally, he is getting crowned King of Kings, Lord of Lords, lamb slain before the creation of the world. In the cross is both suffering and victory.

Amen? In the cross, in the gospel, suffering is right there. Paul could have focused on the disappointments, but he chooses to focus on what God is doing through the gospel.

And we talked about this in our spiritual formation series.

It's a good thing to stop and consider what God has not done, that you asked him to do, and to then reframe that and thank him for what he hasn't done, because you know he's doing something better. Amen. That's gospel focus.

You're in the midst of suffering. Things are not turning out the way you want.

It's pain.

Turn the gospel ring and think, wait on the gospel. Jesus dying for the sin of the world involved suffering, but there was victory next to suffering. Jesus could see it.

The disciples, they couldn't see it. They just see suffering. But there was a victory being brought about in that moment.

So what does suffering look like for you? And how can you reframe it with the gospel? You know, as I look around and talk to people, I think this community of faith, one of the big issues is finding your life partner.

And when you're waiting, being patient, it can feel like a form of suffering. I want to encourage you.

God's at work, he's at work, and he's working on your character, that you might become the sort of person he could match up with someone that he has been desperately wanting to find the partner that was godly and seeking after the work of the gospel

and the glory of Jesus. I just want to encourage you in Jesus' name, God's at work. Of course you might be single, no one knows, but we're invited to bring our needs and our wants before God, amen.

Ask for what you want and you'll shape it into the right thing. For others of us, we're going through really hard relational stuff with family and with health and with work and it feels legitimately unfair. What can you do but reframe?

What can you do but look at it all and all the awful stuff that can be happening and grab that focus ring and say, I'm going to focus on what God is doing behind the scenes.

Amen.

God is good. He's up to something in your life. If you want to listen to a great story that's quite funny of this, have a look at the sermon in the morning and of a camp that we are at that we just were convinced nothing good came from that camp.

But something good did happen because God was working in the background. How do we live out Philippians 1.21? For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

We live with gospel focus, not just amongst and amidst suffering, but amidst confusion. Verse 15, Paul writes, It's true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill.

The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I'm in chains. But what does it matter?

The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this, I rejoice. So Paul is writing to a great church, Philippian church.

It's his favorite church. And we're not sure if there was sort of heretical, weird, funky stuff going on in Philippi.

But he says, if you see someone acting in contrary ways to what the gospel demands, but they're lifting up Christ and it's a bit confusing, trust God, he's still at work. So amidst the confusion of not knowing who to trust, trust God.

I don't know if you've ever put your faith in someone in the church world and they've let you down. Anyone ever had that? It's hard to go in church for too long without having that happen.

I think this is what the disciples experienced. They put all their trust in Jesus and he ends up hanging on a cross. So they were experiencing confusion.

They had to find a way to find gospel focus amidst the confusion. So what do you do when people you look up to let you down? As a young pastor, I really looked up to Bill Hybels.

Show your age and tell me if you know who Bill Hybels is. Lots of us did courses with Bill Hybels in the Seeker Sensitive Model and all that. A few years ago, we find out he had some darker stuff going on, like it's really disappointing.

Some of us are into apologetics. We love got all the books of Ravi Zacharias. Ravi is human and sinful at that.

It really lets you down and it's actually confusing. It's confusing. Who do we trust?

When I was that young zealot and in many years on, I loved AW. Tozer. Anyone ever heard of AW.

Tozer? And then 10 years ago, some guys at church said, have you seen what his wife is saying about AW. Tozer?

That he was a tyrant at home. Told people about Jesus, but his kids didn't like him at all. And his wife was awful.

I went, oh, who's left?

Billy Graham never let us down.

Go, Billy. When I was a young pastor, I'm looking up to this 63-year-old guy, he's the new senior pastor, and one day, he's only been there three months, he says, Princess Diana and Mother Teresa are dancing in heaven tonight.

And I went to him in our, quietly, in our meeting afterwards, I said, I didn't think Princess Diana was necessarily a Christian. What do you mean by that? And that began a conversation to unearth his universalism.

Everyone's going to heaven. Everyone's going to heaven. And I'm like, you're killing me.

I don't want to be in a church that believes that.

I don't want people to go to hell either, but it's just, I don't believe the Bible teaches that the good news is that everybody goes to heaven, goes to the new earth.

And of course, many of us have been influenced by Hillsong conferences, and it's just confusing when really significant leaders like Brian Houston have what you might call falls of grace. Is anyone with me? It's confusing, it's hard.

So what was it, what do you do? I was talking to a family member, more distant family member last night and they were saying, we haven't been to church for a couple of years because we're so broken by the way church has treated our family.

It's real, isn't it? The confusion, the pain. Can I just encourage us?

What does gospel focus do? Pushes away all of the pain and all of the confusion, just focuses in on Jesus on the cross, dying for a sinful world. And that makes me say, I don't get to judge them.

I don't get to stand on a high horse and go, how dare you let me down. Amen. It doesn't mean that we let them keep leading people astray.

There are people with those responsibilities that need to act. But I don't get to judge. I need to just keep believing, no, Jesus is the only one who was pure and righteous and perfect.

And he died for my sin and he died for others. And yeah, I wanna keep being lashed to the mast of accountability and in Christian leadership and being aware there, but by the grace of God go any of us.

So gospel focus is required in the church for to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. Gospel focus amidst suffering, amidst confusion, because these things are coming. They are coming in our lives, in our walk of faith.

Finally, I would just say, we live with gospel focus amidst everything.

Yes, Paul writes, I will continue to rejoice for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, He's in prison, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.

I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now, as always, Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. That's a cracking memory verse, isn't it?

God, I just, I pray that I might have the grace to live in such a way that no matter if I live another X years or die soon, it's gonna give you glory. That's freedom.

That's being united with the most real thing in the universe, the glory of Jesus, amen. That's what Paul writes. He says, then that was the lead up to, for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

He fills my horizon. Paul is saying, he's everything to me. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me.

I know he's prepared good works in advance for me to do. I'm looking for them. I'm hunting them down.

I'm trusting in his grace. What shall I choose? I don't know.

I'm torn between the two. I desire to depart and be with Christ, because he's holding on to this life lightly, isn't he? And that's a key.

Holding on to this life a bit lightly. But it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain.

It's not time for me to die yet. He hasn't written 2 Timothy, I think, he's the last one.

And I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again, your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.

You know, when I turned up to that youth camp, my youth pastor came up to me, and I said, you probably could tell from my breath, because it gets pretty bad at ten days fasting, but he really appreciated that I was pretty focused.

I was pretty focused. When you fast like a 40-hour famine, that, you know, 40 hours, it's an awesome thing for World Vision, it's something different happens when you do a longer fast.

You get after five days, five to ten days, you're not really thinking about food, but you're on another plane.

You're in a focused state, and I'm not suggesting we do that, because I think there's a lot of pride in long fasts like that, and this sort of negative Christian heroism that feeds the pride. But you know what, it feels good to be focused.

It feels good. It feels like you're living in the harness of the easy yoke. Everything other than what matters in the Gospel, and in the responsibilities that I've been given, which are things like my family.

They do matter. It's not just the AW. Tozer.

My family doesn't matter. No, it does matter. Jesus will build his church.

I get to build my family by the grace of God. And you've got to work that stuff out in life. There are things that matter in the Gospel.

It's holistic. But it feels good to start each day focused on the reality that God entered the world once and for all, lived a perfect life and made a way for sinners to come back to God. And you want to be about that no matter what job you do.

Most people aren't going to be in full time paid ministry, but you're going to be in full time paid ministry. You're going to be paid by somebody to represent Jesus. Amen.

That's what we all do. Some of us sort of have a Christian label in the front of it, but we're all representing Christ. Gospel focus.

This is a genuine question. Probably don't have time to get the wisdom of the room, but for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain. Sounds like a sprint.

Doesn't it?

Just seems like there's the end.

Come on.

Heart rate's up.

And you get to the end. Oh, it's a marathon.

It's a marathon.

That's the question I want to leave us with. Philippians 1.21, for to me to live is Christ, unbridled passion. I'm all in, Lord, I'm all in.

How long for?

Sub-salt scripture Sunday, right?

Rhythms. Rhythms that drive our habits, that we become the sort of people who you could ask, are you sold out for Jesus? And we can say, yeah, I am, but it's not a sprint.

But I'm sold out and I'm in a bunch of Christian community. I mean, we've got some friends and we regularly ask ourselves, is Philippians 1.21 true for us? How can we make it more true?

By God's grace. I heard someone say recently, most people overestimate what they can achieve in a year, but underestimate what they can achieve in 10. What could you achieve in 10 years with gospel focus?

This morning, we had one of our biggest services we've had on a normal day is 194 people. He was so great. Praise the Lord.

I asked the question, who has led anyone to Christ in your life? If it was 5% of that nearly 200 people, I think I'd be exaggerating. I think it was less.

That's no judgment, but it's sobering. What are we doing? Who's leading people to Christ?

It's not a sprint, but it is the focus. To live as Christ is to believe and agree. He's my Lord.

He has paid for my sin. I don't have to worry about that. I'm so grateful.

He's my teacher, my life coach. He's the smartest person. This is Jesus, the smartest person to ever live.

So I'm going to listen to and read to the Sermon on the Mount because it's his most concentrated, amazing teaching. He's my spiritual guide, Jesus, my mentor, my support, my strength. He's my king.

This is the statement and resolution you're saying as you get out of bed. He's my God. He will never leave me.

I'm trusting him. His grace is enough for today and tomorrow. His love is enough.

If I get sick, he's enough. When I fall, he's enough. When I succeed, he is enough.

To live is Christ. And to pray, Lord, I want to understand what that means. To live is Christ.

He's all around me and in me, and I am in him because of the gospel. And to die, it's sad for those left. But if you're in Christ, it's all good.

Amen. It is. It's all good.

I wonder if we can take a little bit of this. I'm finished and done with low living. Sight walking, small planning, smooth knees, colorless dreams, chintzy giving and dwarf to goals.

I'm done. By God's grace, I, by God's grace, will not flinch in the face of sacrifice. By God's grace, hesitate in the presence of adversity, in community, together, in the grace of God.

We're not going to negotiate at the table of the enemy. Ponder at the pool of popularity. We'll slow down and meander in the maze of mediocrity.

Why? Because I'm a disciple of Jesus.

Amen.

With gospel focus, no matter the suffering, no matter the confusion, in everything, by God's grace. Gospel focus. Jazz and Ben are going to come and sing for us a song that I listen to regularly.

It's from Rend Collective. And I trust it will be a blessing to you. Lord God, we thank you so much that you've given us something to live for.

We remembered this morning that Peter says in his epistle that the angels, they ponder and look into the Gospel. Well, do we want to be people who have a focus on what you achieve, Jesus, and be heralds of the good news with all that is within us?

Help us, we pray, to understand more and more fully what it is to live is Christ. To die is gain. What it is to live that out.

Amen.