

Remnant Life Church
February 27, 2022
The Church of the Philippians
Part 8
Something to Live and Die For
Phil 1:20-21

Life today can be very complicated and confusing

- I realize that statement is pretty ambiguous
- In other words, it is very broad and doesn't offer anything to address either of those two things
- So, you might say – it is complicated and it is confusing...and....
- You don't really get much from that other than perhaps a sarcastic, "No kidding!"

I grew up a huge fan of the Peanuts cartoon by Charles Shultz

- Every Christmas as a little boy growing up, I would get a new Peanuts book in my stocking
- Began in 1947 under the title *Li'l Folks* in a St. Paul, Minnesota newspaper but that name was already in use in another location
 - The name *Peanuts* was suggested by someone at United Artists, and it stuck despite Shultz saying he hated the title from the very beginning all the way through its run
- New Peanuts cartoon appeared for exactly 50 years beginning in 1950 and ending with the death of Shultz in 2000
 - And no new strips have been drawn in the past 22 years because Shultz's family was adamant that he would be the only one to create the cartoons
 - In those 50 years, 17,897 strips were published and at the time of Shultz's death, the cartoon was being seen in 2600 newspapers with a readership of over 355 million in 75 countries having been translated into 21 languages
 - The artist earned over 1 billion dollars from the marketing, merchandise, and syndications
- But before you think that this was just a mindless cartoon that only children would enjoy, there were many panels Shultz created that dealt with very deep and meaningful truths – the existence of God, wrestling with loneliness and first love, and of course the true meaning of Christmas
 - The humor of Peanuts has been described as being psychologically complex as it is driven by the character's often very adult interactions and relationships
 - But one of the marks of the comic was its wholesome nature owing to Shultz being a devote Christian
- One such cartoon has Lucy presenting a very profound life metaphor:
 - *Lucy is front and center at her psychiatrist booth, delivering one of her familiar lectures to you-know-who. She said, "Charlie Brown, life is a lot like a deck chair. Some place it so that they can see where they are going. Others place it where they can see where they have been. And some place it so they can see*

where they are at the present. On the cruise ship of life, Charlie Brown, which way is your deck chair facing?"

Charlie Brown sighs, and says, "I can't even get my chair unfolded!"

- So, yes, life can be complicated and confusing filled with deck chairs that are sometimes hard to unfold
 - And in those times, it can even become hard to determine what you are living for
 - But the Apostle Paul did not have that problem and we read this morning what he not only felt about life but about death as well

READ – Phil 1:20-21

Paul was obviously very confident when he wrote:

- He was confident that he would be delivered from prison
 - He was confident that his actions and words regarding his work for the Gospel would never bring him shame
 - He is confident that the prayers of his supporters will be answered
 - And he is confident that, even in death, he will fight the good fight and not give up – we read all of this in verses 12-19
- But make no mistake, that confidence is in God and his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – not in himself!
- Paul's life was about one thing – serving God
 - And it did not matter if it was in life or in the face of death
 - Either way, Paul would continue in the way he had demonstrated and taught
- Let's look at the 21st verse again
 - He writes, *For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*
 - This 11-word verse is a summary of Paul's life principle
 - Paul's basic life focus and philosophy was, very simply, when you live for Christ, death is a victory.
 - Now that is not easy to process
 - How death has been viewed throughout history has changed a great deal
 - Most warring cultures considered it a privilege to die in battle
 - In this country views of death have changed profoundly
 - What was once shocking when seen is of no great concern now as movies, television, and more recently video games have almost completely desensitized us especially our children
 - Yet, Paul presents a rather unique view of what it means for a Christian when this life comes to an end – he sees it as a promotion!
 - Let's look a little bit more closely at the two parts of that verse
- ...to live is Christ
 - What must be understood before we proceed is an undeniable thought – everyone is living for something

- Every person who has lived in the past, who is alive today, or who will live in the future must fill in the blank in this sentence: “For me to live is _____.”
- What are some of the words that may be used to fill in that blank?
 - If you are a professional athlete, then you might say, “For me to live is basketball, football or baseball.”
 - If you are a professional musician, then you might say, “For me to live is music or my instrument, or performing”
 - A teenager might say, “For me to live is my boyfriend, my girlfriend, my friends, or my iPhone.”
 - A parent or grandparent might say, “For me to live is my children/grandchildren.”
 - The list of possibilities is endless – a person can live for self, their career, fun, sex, money, possessions, you name it.
 - But regardless of how you might fill in that blank, the point of this illustration is no one leaves this sentence blank.
- And so what does it mean when Paul says, *For me to live is Christ*?
 - It means that his every action, thought, and word in your life revolves around Christ
 - What do you fill in that blank with? Is it Christ or something of your own desires?
- Well the answer to that question is what helps you to understand the second part of Paul’s words,*but to die is gain*.
- If you fill in the blank with anything other than Christ, look what it does to the outcome of your life
 - If for you to live is money, then to die is leave all the money you have accumulated behind – it is lost.
 - If for you to live is career, then to die is to lose that job.
 - If for you to live is for the pleasures of your life, your hobbies, your possessions or anything else then to die is to lose all of that.
 - If you live for anything other than Christ, to die is loss.
 - Because everything else that we might live for other than Christ is tied to this world, and to die is to leave it in this world.
- But for the Christian, to die is to gain the full presence of God the Father as we worship Him in absolute perfection
 - This means that the loss for a Christian at the time of physical death is the loss of everything we don’t need –
 - We lose the world, the flesh, and the temptations of sin.
 - We lose our trials, our troubles, pain, sickness, our tears, and our weaknesses.
- And the main thing every Christian should come to understand is that death is nothing to be feared
 - Dare I say it should even be anticipated?

- Notice I did not say pursued – God put into our very DNA the important concept of self-preservation
 - But fear should be gone as we know what awaits us and it is so far superior to what we know now
- *There was a Southern evangelist and pastor by the name of Dr. John Rice who ministered in Texas in the early and mid 20th-century. He was also the founder of The Sword of the Lord, a publication that gained national distribution. He was once preaching in a meeting just south of Dallas and he was preaching hard against sin, the troubles of a life without Jesus, and especially against the bootleggers bringing illegal liquor into that small Texas town. Now those powers behind the bootlegging decided that this pesky evangelist needed to be silenced. So, they sent a message to Dr. Rice saying, “Stop preaching against us or we will kill you!” Dr. Rice sent a reply in return, “You can’t threaten me with heaven!” “Go ahead, kill me. You will be doing me a favor for I know where I am going!”*
- The focus of what we are talking about this morning, however, is not death. It is life in Christ!
 - Wherever God has you right now, embrace every opportunity to rise above the struggle and embrace the opportunities within it.
 - You might be thinking, yeah, right – you don’t know my situation
 - And you would be right, but God does
 - Paul made the best of being in a first-century Roman prison and continued to shine the light of God’s love
 - I seriously doubt your situation is worse than that
 - What you must decide is, how are you going to choose to respond to the circumstances of your life right now?
 - Is your life being lived to serve God?
 - Is that the answer you place in that blank?
 - Paul chose to respond in a way that took the focus off of himself and placed it solely and squarely on God
 - What more of a perfect goal than that for us to also pursue and embrace – regardless of the circumstances