

The Reason We Live
The Reason We Live (Part 3)
Philippians 1:18b-26
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There are a number of fascinating people from the last century, but I think if we were to make a list of those who were the most eccentric, I think for most of us a man by the name of Howard Hughes would be on that list. You may not know this, but the billionaire recluse set four goals early in his life. Four things for which he would live, and that which he would pursue. One was to be the world's richest man. The second was to be the world's most famous aviator. The third, the best film-maker, and fourth the best golfer. In fact, he, on the golf front, he was so taken up with it that he decided he would pay to have his golf swing shot from a helicopter, hoping that perhaps that angle could give him some additional insight into his swing. That may be something some of you want to consider. While he came close to accomplishing several of his goals, later in life—and this is what, unfortunately, he's become known for—is he became an old and decrepit morphine addict. He was paranoid about germs and insisted that any item brought to him be shrouded in Kleenex. In those twilight years he used to bottle his urine and store it in the cupboards. He surrounded himself with lackeys who pandered to his every whim, including banning all of his associates from eating onions, garlic, and other so-called breath-destroyers. While he was fastidious about breath, he lived in total squalor, never cleaning his penthouse suites. In some cases, he wouldn't leave the suite for years at a time. When he finally died in 1976, the billionaire had spent decades shooting up morphine with hypodermic needles that he never bothered to sterilize. In fact, the doctors who examined his body at death found fragments of the needles that he'd used still lodged in his arm after his death. After years of neglect and abuse, his 6'4" frame had withered to 90 pounds at his death. Hardly anyone outside of his entourage had seen him in more than 20 years. Howard Hughes, one of the world's most powerful, richest, and for a time, most famous men, could only be positively identified by his fingerprints. What a tragic story. Here's the story of a man who lived and died for all the wrong reasons.

We've been learning the right reasons for living from the pen of the great apostle Paul, in the first chapter of Philippians. We've been looking at a paragraph that starts in the middle of verse 18 and runs through verse 26, and as we've been examining this paragraph, we've seen the apostle's heart. One of the most personal paragraphs he ever wrote. And we've discovered, in this paragraph, his reason for living. And Paul's reason for living consists of three great ambitions. In the three sections of this paragraph, he explains each of those great ambitions. As I continue to remind you, the purpose of Philippians is to teach us to think like Christians. And if we're going to think like Christians, then these three ambitions should frame the foundation of

our lives. We should have, with Paul, these three great ambitions in life. What are they? Well, the first one, we found in the first section of the paragraph, and that is to exalt Christ. To exalt Christ. Notice the middle of verse 18:

Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that this will turn out for my vindication through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope, [or literally, my anxious longing, my desire—my passionate desire] that I will not be put to shame in anything [when I stand before God] but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body whether by life or by death.

Paul lived to exalt Jesus Christ.

We began, last week, to examine what should be our second great ambition in life, and it's found in the second section of this paragraph, and we'll finish our study of it this morning. It is simply, not only to exalt Christ, but secondly to be with Christ. Notice verses 21 to 24. Paul writes:

for to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.

Now the theme of this second section of this paragraph is the phrase “having the strong desire to depart and be with Christ.” And it frames the powerful lesson that lies behind these verses, and that is this: that like Paul, each of us who truly are believers should long to be with Jesus Christ. But how can we gain that kind of mindset? As I mentioned last week, that seems so foreign to where most people, and even Christians, live. Paul longed to depart this life and to be with Christ. And as he discusses his thinking about this, he provides us with two practical steps that we can take to begin to think like he does. Last week, I mentioned there would be three steps, but as I got into studying it this week, I really think there are only two. We began last time to look at the first of those steps—these two steps that will enable us, like Paul, to have as one of our great ambitions in life to be with Christ.

The first was this—develop a biblical perspective about life and death. You want to long to be with Christ? You want to reflect Paul's attitude in that? Then you need to develop a biblical perspective about life and about death. We tend to think as the world thinks about these things. But Paul wants us to imitate him. You see, he records his thoughts here, not because he has any ultimate influence on whether he lives or dies as he sits in this Roman prison, but because he wants us to understand his thinking. He wants us to understand his attitude toward life and

death. Paul is, in essence, providing for us a Biblical perspective about life and about death. And he begins with this immortal phrase, “for to me to live is Christ.” He’s saying, for me, living is Christ. Christ is what I live for. He means that for him, life is so full of Christ, so occupied with Christ that if you wanted to summarize his life, you would use one word, Christ. He thinks about Christ. He talks about Christ. He makes decisions based on his relationship to Christ. His life has Christ absolutely dead center. To live is Christ. And he adds, “to die is gain.” It’s a shocking statement, because most people fear death. Francis Bacon wrote, “men fear death like children fear the dark.” Samuel Johnson, that brilliant mind, after witnessing the death of a friend, wrote these chilling words. “At the sight of this last conflict, I felt a sensation never known to me before. A confusion of passions—an awful stillness of sorrow, a gloomy terror without a name.” But for the Christian, it should be different. The end result of death for us, like Paul, should be gain. As we saw last time, that word “gain” is a very interesting word. It literally means “interest.” Paul is saying my death is like receiving an interest payment on the investment that I made with my life. That’s the attitude Paul wants us to have toward death.

Now, that’s where we left off last time. And Paul is still trying, as we pick it up this time, Paul is still trying to help us develop a biblical perspective about life and death. He’s still helping us think rightly about this. He says, not only is to live Christ, not only is to die gain, but also, he adds, verse 22, “to live is fruitful labor.” “But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me.” You see, Paul says, if I’m released, and I continue to live, then that means that I will, literally, do this. Let me put it differently. He says this: If I’m released, if I continue living in my mortal body, then “this to me fruit of work”; a very awkward Greek expression, “this to me fruit of work.” Here’s what he’s saying. He’s saying, I will be able to minister again if I’m released. And that ministry will produce fruit. The work that I do in Christ’s name will produce fruit. What kind of fruit? Well, certainly the salvation of souls. The upbuilding, or the building up of the church. But also the establishment of new churches. Paul says, if I live, it’s going to mean fruitful labor. For us, as believers, that should be the purpose of our lives. When we say that to live is Christ, we’re not talking about just some experiential thing—some mystical thing where we lock ourselves in a closet. No, to live is Christ, in the sense that it’s to minister on His behalf. It’s to serve others. It’s to communicate the gospel. It’s to use our gifts in the church. It’s to do whatever we can to have fruitful ministry.

Paul adds one more component to our Biblical perspective on life and death. He says not only to live is Christ and to die is gain, and to live is fruitful labor, but to choose is impossible. Notice what he says in verse 22, “I do not know which to choose, but I’m hard-pressed from both directions.” You see, as Paul is sitting in this Roman prison, chained to a member of the Imperial Guard, and contemplating the reality that he might live or he might be executed, he goes through this mental exercise of saying that if it were in my power—if I had the choice, what would I choose? Life or death? And he says, I don’t know. I don’t know. In fact, the word translated “know” is used in the Greek in a very similar way to our expression “I can’t tell.” I

just can't tell. For Paul, you see, both alternatives, life and death, are desirable. Just for different reasons. Listen to what the commentator Mohl writes, "The apostle asks, which is most worth his while, to live or to die? The same question is often presented to us, and perhaps our reply has been the same. But, maybe we have made it for a far different reason. Life and death have seemed to us like two evils, and we do not know which was the less. To the apostle, they seemed two immense blessings, and he knows not which is the better." Life and death, both immense blessings, and I don't know which to choose. Paul adds, "I am hard-pressed from both directions." That word "hard-pressed" is a powerful word. It describes someone who's hemmed in on both sides, so that he has no room to move. In fact, you see a picture of it in Luke 19. In Luke 19:43, Christ says, "For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you and surround you and hem you in on every side." "Hem you in" is our word. The idea of pressing you from both sides. Have you ever been in a tight place where you even wondered if you were going to be stuck and have to have assistance to get out, and you feel that constriction—that pressure? Paul says that's how I feel. I'm pressed on this side by life, and what it means in ministry and what it means to you in Philippi, and yet I'm pressed on this side by the longing to be with Christ. And I honestly don't know what to choose. The biblical perspective about life and death is simply this: For you, as a Christian—if you're in Christ—for you living should be living for Christ, and living to minister in His name to others. But dying should be better, because death catapults us into the presence of Jesus Christ. To think like a Christian is to long to depart and to be with Christ. That is what you want for yourself. But, you prefer to stay here, solely because of the ministry you can have for others. And in the end you should, like Paul, leave the choice with God and be content, whether it means life or death—whatever God chooses because both are wonderful and an immense blessing.

So if you want to begin to think like Paul, and you want how to long to be with Christ, then there are two practical steps you can take. The first, as we have just seen, is to develop a Biblical perspective about life and death. The second practical step that Paul gives us to here to learn how to create this ambition in our hearts to long to be with Christ, is this: Learn to value Christ's presence. Learn to value Christ's presence. Notice the second half of verse 23 and verse 24, "having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better, yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake." The English word "desire" translates a very common New Testament word. But it's one that's usually used negatively. It's the Greek word that's commonly translated "lust." Now, unfortunately for us the word lust conjures up sexual sin, and certainly it includes that. But it's a much broader word. In fact, this word "desire," or "lust," is a neutral word. It is good or evil depending on the object that you desire or that you crave. Paul delights in something. He has a strong desire. This word describes the longing of the soul for what will give it delight. Perhaps we could best translate it "craving." I have this craving in my heart. Paul delights in and desires something. In fact, you could even say he craves it. Notice the word "having" in English. In Greek, as in English, it's in the present tense. That means this

is an ongoing craving of his heart. He says I just keep on constantly having this craving in my heart.

What exactly is it that he constantly craves? Having the desire to depart. Having the desire to depart. Paul uses this word in a different form in 2 Timothy. Near the end of his life, he writes this in 2 Timothy 4:6, “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.” This expression “to depart” or “departure” is as close as the Bible gets to describing the process of dying. This Greek word that translated “depart” is a very picturesque word. It’s used several ways in the original language and in the secular Greek. It’s used to describe a ship that’s loosed from its moorings and it’s raising its anchor preparing to set sail. It describes a group of soldiers who are folding up their tents and breaking camp. You see, to the Christian, the process of dying is departing. It’s like raising an anchor and setting sail for heaven. It’s like folding up our earthly tents and breaking camp for the short journey home to heaven, where we’ll move into our permanent house—that glorified body that will be just like our Lord’s. You see this picture of the tent used often in the New Testament to describe this earthly life and this earthly body. We saw it last time in 2 Corinthians chapter 5, but turn there. Let me just remind you of verse 1. Second Corinthians 5:11 — Paul writes “for we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down [now he’s speaking of the human body—this earthly existence. If this earthly tent is torn down, that is, it’s broken down, we’re preparing to move on] we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” Peter describes life here the same way in 2 Peter, near the end of his life as well. Second Peter 1:13, he writes, “I consider it right as long as I’m in this earthly dwelling [and there’s the picture of this tent] to stir you up by way of reminder, knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me.” What a wonderful picture for the Christian. For the Christian to die is like raising anchor and setting sail for a great harbor. It’s like breaking camp.

But what is the journey itself like? What is the actual journey like from the moment the soul leaves the body until we’re present with the Lord? Well, there’s only one passage that I know of in the New Testament that describes that time, and that’s in Luke chapter 16. I want you to turn there. A very interesting picture our Lord paints of what happens has happened to our loved ones, or will happen to us if the Lord should tarry—between the moment our souls leave our bodies and they appear in the presence of Christ. Luke 16:19, you have the story of the rich man and Lazarus, and verse 22 says, “Now the poor man [that is Lazarus] died.” We’re not told about his spiritual condition in this story Christ tells, but the obvious implication is that he knew God. He was a true believer in God, perhaps even through Christ. Notice what he says in verse 22, “Now the poor man died” and what happened when he died? What happened when his body fell asleep? He “was carried away by the angels to Abraham’s bosom.” “Abraham’s bosom” is just another expression for being in the presence of Abraham—at the banquet in the presence of God—heaven. So that brief transition from the moment our spirits leave our bodies until we’re

present with the Lord. We are borne there by the same ministering spirits that often ministered to us in this life, even though we aren't often aware of it. Those same angels bear us to the presence of the Lord. But it's a very brief journey, because Paul writes "to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord." So Paul longs to pull anchor and to pack up his earthly tent—to have the angels bear him to heaven. But his craving doesn't stop there. You see, all some people want is to check out from this life. All they want is to be out from under the problems and the troubles and the pressures of this life. They long to depart. That's not Paul. There's one reason he wants to depart. He says it's to be with Christ. You see, the clear implication for Paul is that to depart from this body is to be with Christ. That's a point, by the way, that Scripture everywhere emphasizes of true believers. The moment we leave this life, we will be with our Lord. Listen to John 23:43. Jesus, hanging on the cross, says to the thief—the repentant thief hanging next to him—"truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise." John 14:3, Jesus, on that last night before His crucifixion says to his disciples, "if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. Second Corinthians 5:8, Paul writes, "We are of good courage I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord."

Now, let me pause here and clear up something that's often misunderstood. Because in the New Testament "sleep" is often used as a euphemism for death, some people have pictured this that the moment the body dies, the soul sort of goes into this state of unconsciousness, or soul sleep. It's unaware until the resurrection occurs. That is not at all what the Bible teaches. Paul says, "to be absent from the body is to be present [or at home] with the Lord." There are several other indicators of this reality. When Christ spoke of God as "the God of the living," he was referring to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He says, "God is not the God of the dead. He's the God of the living." And then when you come to the transfiguration, remember that Moses and Elijah show up there. And what are they doing with Christ? They're talking. They're visiting, very much conscious, very much alive. In Luke 16, where we were just looking, there's a picture Christ gives us, from an actual event that occurred, of a man who died by the name of Lazarus, and went to heaven, and a rich man who's unnamed who went to Hell. In both cases, they are fully conscious—fully alert. Abraham, Lazarus, the rich man, all very much aware of what's going on around them. So "sleep" describes the state of the body. Sleep is what death looks like to us who are in this world. When we see a person who has died, it looks like they're asleep. But they are not in some sort of soul sleep. They are fully conscious, wherever they will spend eternity.

There's another passage that drives home the reality that to be away from the body is to be with Christ for the Christian. First Thessalonians 4:17 describes the rapture. That "we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds and meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we [too, we could say] always be with Lord" even as those who are already there are currently with the Lord. Now why is this so important? Why does the Scripture make such a point of saying that we're going to be with Christ? Well, is it for us? Is it because we get all the

benefit? No, Christ Himself explains why this is so important, that we as Christians be with Christ in John 17:24. Listen to His high priestly prayer He prays to His Father, “Father, I desire that they also whom You have given me [that’s us] be with Me where I am”... Why? “so that they may see My glory which You have given Me.” You see, it’s important for us to be with Christ for all eternity because we will see His glory and will praise Him for it. We will spend eternity being with Christ so we can spend eternity praising and exalting Jesus Christ, just as God designed. You see, eternity, and all that God’s accomplishing in the world isn’t about us. God is not fixated on us, although He loves us, and He loves us dearly. His end purpose in the world is to exalt His Son. And in eternity, that purpose will be true as well. We will be part of a redeemed humanity who will live our eternity bringing praise and glory and honor to the only One in the universe that deserves it. And that is our great God and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. That’s what we were created for. That’s why we were redeemed. So being with Christ isn’t for us, although we certainly will enjoy the benefits of it. Being with Christ is for Christ, so that He gets the glory that He deserves. We will spend eternity exalting Him. So Paul says we should have a deep craving to depart this life and to be with Christ.

Notice Paul’s comparison of dying and being with Christ versus living here. He says in verse 23, “for that is very much better.” That seems so foreign to us, doesn’t it? To say that to depart this life and to be with Christ is “very much better.” How can we begin to develop that kind of attitude? Well, I think the key to developing an attitude like that toward heaven is understanding our death benefits. Many of you have life insurance policies. When you got that life insurance policy, one of the important parts of it was a listing of the benefits that would accrue to the beneficiary in the event of your death. But when the Christian dies, while those who survive you may get the benefits that you accumulated in this life, you, as a Christian, get the benefits of your death as well. You accrue benefits. You see, why is the result of death an asset for us? Why is it gain? What benefits does it bring? Well, there are many, but let me just remind you of a few. Here’s why you can begin to develop this attitude like Paul and you can learn to value Christ’s presence. Because you begin to understand what death brings to you. Again, just a few. First, upon death we will be removed from the presence of sin. If you love Christ, then that means so much to you. You hate your sin and you long to be free of it. You long to reflect the beauty and the glory of Christ. If you’re a true Christian, then that’s what’s in your heart. And death brings a complete absence of sin. Revelation 21:17, speaking of heaven, says that nothing unclean will enter there. What a great reality. Nothing unclean will be there. Same expression in Revelation 22:15, Galatians 5:21, Ephesians 5:5. It’s throughout the Scripture. There’ll be no sin there. There’ll be none who practice sin. Sin will be done for us. What an amazing death benefit. Also, the benefit that we will accrue will be this—to enjoy perfect worship. To enjoy perfect worship. You know, we enjoy gathering like this on the Lord’s day. We enjoy lifting up our voices and our hearts before the Lord, but if we’re honest, we have to say that it falls so short of what God deserves. We understand our own hearts, and we see that. But someday we will worship Him perfectly. We will worship God as He deserves to be worshipped. We see that in

Revelation 4 and 5 as we're let in on that scene around the throne of God and we get to see perfect worship. We will participate in that. We will join with literally myriads of myriads and millions of millions of angels and redeemed, lifting up our voices in worship to God. Our worship will be perfect. Also, upon death, we get rid of this body—the body that Paul calls in Romans 7, this body of death. And at the resurrection we get a new body. Second Corinthians 15 says at the last trumpet the dead will be raised imperishable, and we'll all be changed.

There's another benefit that comes to us at death, and that is, we understand fully. We understand fully. First Corinthians 13:12. Then, he says—Paul—we will know fully, just as we are known. Ever frustrated by your lack of knowledge about God and His ways, and how to live in a way that pleases Him? Well, then we'll know fully. We'll understand. Another benefit is, we'll enter into eternal, unceasing and perfect joy. We experience just little glimpses of that in our lives here. There are moments when we feel literally carried out of ourselves by the joy of some event of this life. But it's interrupted immediately by sorrow, by a reminder of the pressures and the troubles of life, of the things that we have to do, the issues that have to be dealt with, the people that are bringing pain and sorrow to our hearts. But there, our joy will be uninterrupted and it will be perfect. I love Psalm 16, and in Psalm 16:11 we're reminded that at God's right hand, there are pleasures forevermore. In His presence there is fullness of joy.

Also, to die—to leave this body—is to be reunited with those whom we loved on earth, and to meet new friends from all the saints from all the ages. Look at Hebrews chapter 12. It reminds us of this great privilege. Hebrews chapter 12:22,. “But you have come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.” What do we find there? What do we find when we get to that wonderful place? To myriads of angels. You and I will have the opportunity to interact with millions of angels. Verse 23, “to the general assembly and the church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven” and he ends it “with the spirits of the righteous made perfect.” You and I get to enjoy not only those people whom we've known here on earth that we love and who are there, and those who will be there in years to come, but also with those we've never met. We'll enjoy making friendships and establishing relationships throughout eternity. But not only are they there. Verse 23 says God is there. And verse 24 says Jesus is there. It will be a place where relationships are reunited and where new ones are formed in the most profound and deep way you can imagine.

Second Corinthians 5:8 says that another death benefit is, we'll be at home with the Lord. At home with the Lord. I love that expression. You know, even here, there's something about the concept of home, of being home, that brings a sense of joy—a sense of peace and calm. Well, we're not really home. The Bible tells us our citizenship is in heaven. Someday we'll be home. And we'll be home with the Lord. It reminds me of the story I read some years about a missionary who had spent 50 years serving Christ in Africa. And he was returning from Africa and he was on board ship and he thought there might be a few people there to greet him. But as

the boat pulled into the harbor, he looked out across the dock and it literally was teeming with people, all with cheering and bells and whistles and signs. And he thought surely they're not here to see me. I had no idea. Well, he discovered that he was right, because in fact, on that same boat Teddy Roosevelt was returning from a safari in Africa. They were all there to meet him. But to his great disappointment, not one person had shown up to greet him after 50 years of faithful service as a missionary in Africa. He went to his motel room and he threw himself on his bed somewhat despondent that he's come home and there's no one to greet him. There's no one to welcome him and no one even say well done. And as the story goes, as he was lying there weeping on his motel bed, a thought came to his mind that was as clear as if the Lord had spoken to him, and that was, Son, you're not home yet. You remember the scene from the end of the stoning of Stephen, there in Acts 7? We're told in Hebrews that Christ sits at the right hand of God, but in Acts 7, Stephen looks up as he's being stoned—as the stones are coming in and crushing the life out of his body. And who does he see? He sees Christ, not sitting, but what, standing. Ready to welcome Stephen home. For us, death means we'll be home. We'll be home with Christ.

Another benefit that you see in the New Testament that comes with death is: we'll be like Christ. First John 3:2 says when we see Him, we'll be like Him. We live, as Christians, to be like our Lord, and when we see Him, upon death, we'll be like Him. And then Philippians 1:23 tells us that we'll be with Him.

Those are just a few of the reasons that, for the Christian, to depart this life is very much better. Barnes writes this, “does the prisoner, long confined in a dungeon, dread the hour which is to open his prison and permit him to return to his family and friends? Does the man in a foreign land long in exile dread the hour when he'll embark on the ocean to be conveyed where he'll be embraced by the friends of his youth? Does the sick man dread the hour which restores him to health, the afflicted the hour of comfort, the wanderer at night the cheering light of returning day? The obvious answer is no. And why then should the Christian dread the hour which will restore him to immortal life? --which shall remove all his sorrows? --which shall introduce him to everlasting day?” You see, if you long for all of those benefits that heaven and being with Christ can bring, it means that you consider death to be gain. In fact, as Paul says in verse 23, dying is very much better than living here. John Piper writes, in response to this passage, “Really? Better? Better than all the friends at school? Better than falling in love? Better than hugging your children? Better than professional success? Better than retirement and grandchildren? Yes, yes, a thousand times better.” Is that true of you? Do you believe that? Do you really believe that being with Christ is better than all of the joys that this life provides? Paul says it is, and it's because we get to be with Christ.

If you want to have as one of your greatest ambitions in life to be with Christ, not only do you need to learn to develop a Biblical perspective about life and death but you also need to learn,

like Paul, to value Christ's presence. And you learn to value His presence by learning to appreciate Him. As I mentioned last week, study Him. Concentrate on Him. Reflect on Him. Read about Him. And also by reading and meditating and thinking about all of the benefits that come to us upon death. But Paul balances this desire he has to depart with something else. Notice verse 24. "Yet to remain in the flesh is more necessary for your sake." Paul says, on the one hand, this is what I want: I want to depart and I want to be with Christ. But there's something else that presses me beyond my own desires, and it's what you need. I know of some who have used this passage as an excuse for contemplating taking their own life. In other words, they see Paul's words here as an some sort of an excuse for suicide. They've misinterpreted the passage and they thought of death as a friend rather than as 1 Corinthians says, an enemy. The truth is that suicide is the last great act of selfishness of an utterly selfish person. It shows utter disregard of others. What Paul is practicing here is exactly the opposite of selfishness. It's a disciplined self-denial. Notice his two choices, to depart or to remain. He says the first is very much better for me, verse 23, but the second is much more necessary for you, verse 24. So, at least for now, he's forgetting what he wants because of what's best for the Philippians. You see, the church in Philippi had only been in existence a little more than 10 years, and while it was a wonderful church, there were a lot of serious problems that were developing there. And so while Paul prefers death because that is to his own personal advantage, he expects life, because that will be to their advantage.

What's the application of this principle? When you and I find ourselves in life and death circumstances, it's easy just to think of ourselves. It's easy to say, God, just take me so I don't have to continue dealing with this disease, or with the pain, or with all the problems. I just can't enjoy life any more. And while that's understandable, that's not how we should be thinking because that is really self-focused. You see, even in the midst of our own personal trouble and suffering, like Paul, we should be thinking of others. Notice he says, "to remain on in the flesh." He's simply referring to continuing to live in his mortal body. He says that's more necessary for your sake. Why? Well, we'll see it in detail next week, but notice verse—Philippians 1:25: "Convinced of this [that is convinced that remaining on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake] I know that I will remain, and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again." Paul says, listen, I don't live for myself. I'm not even going to make the choice of death, even though that's to my own personal advantage, because I live for you. I'm concerned about you. Do you want your life to reflect the heart of Paul? Do you want to live to imitate his great ambition to be with Christ? Do you want to crave to be with Christ? Then you need to take these two practical steps. You need to develop a biblical perspective on life and death. How do you do that? Simply by learning to think like Paul thinks in these verses. Study these verses. Learn what it means that to live is Christ. To die is gain. To live on in the flesh is fruitful labor. And to choose is impossible. Think about that. Meditate on that. And you'll develop a biblical perspective on life and death. And secondly, the second practical step you

need to take is learn to value Christ's presence by meditating and reflecting on the benefits that become yours at death. And as you think about that, God will loosen your grip on this life. You know, sometimes, as Christians we are so earthbound. C.S. Lewis gives the wonderful illustration of the fact that, really, this life in which we live is not the reality; Heaven is the reality. This life is like a stage play. And these are just props. Oh, they're real enough. God made them. But they're just props. And someday, the director will end the play and He'll assess the performance of the actors, and then we'll enter into the true reality, which is heaven itself. May God help us to live like we believe that.

Perhaps you're here this morning and as you've heard me talk about longing to be with Christ, and that being far better than the joys you enjoy here in life, it just doesn't make any sense. It may very well be because you don't know Christ. You don't really know Him. You've not experienced the forgiveness of sins that He provides. I plead with you this morning, be willing to let go of those sins—to repent of those sins, and to turn and to embrace Jesus Christ as your Lord, your Savior. And then you'll understand because He'll give you a new heart. He'll give you a new set of desires, a new set of longings, and you can look forward to being with Him because all of us will be conscious both in this life and forever somewhere.

Let's pray together. Father, thank You for the way Your Word cuts to our attitudes and our thoughts. Lord, we as Your people, confess that we are too often bound and tied to this world. Lord, help us to remember that our citizenship is in heaven. That this isn't our home—this isn't our country. We seek a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Lord, I pray that you would loosen our hold on these things and help us, like Paul, to long to depart this life and to be with Christ. And yet, Lord, even as that would be to our own advantage, help us, like Paul, to see the importance of ministering here—not be so quick to want to exit this life, but rather, to have as our heart's ambition in life, to serve Christ by serving those who belong to Him. Lord help us to think rightly. Thank You for this wonderful passage that sets our thinking straight. And Lord, we do pray for any this morning who will not be with Christ for eternity, but will be fully conscious in eternal suffering. Lord, I pray this morning that You would bring them to the place of repentance, and they will fall before Christ and embrace Him as Lord and Savior. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.