

## Victory of the Lamb – Unshakeable Purpose – Philippians 1:18b-26

July 15, 2018 – Pastor Bill Limmer

Immediately following the terroristic attack of 9/11 a lot of peoples lives changed directions. There was an enhanced sense of national pride and the desire to serve our country. There was a boost in people signing up to be in the armed forces. Likely, you know someone who is or was in the military because of that event. This past week in Sun Prairie, WI an explosion level a couple of buildings and shut down the mainstreet. A firefighter lost his life and two firefighters and a police officer were injured. I saw video of one of the firefighters receiving a heroes welcome back to his fire station as he sported his broken jaw, ribs, and burns. He was willing to sacrifice his life for others. I will give you the person's characteristics and see if you guess correctly who I am talking about: lived in India, lived a life of poverty, helped the poor and the outcast: Mother Teresa. President of the United States, abolished slavery and kept the union together: Abraham Lincoln. **YOLO – you only live once**. It has been said that when people are on their death bed while they may have regrets about what they did, their biggest regret is over what they did not do. Everybody sooner or later and often it is ongoing struggles with what their purpose is in life. There are books, seminars, conferences, online courses, life coaches, and slogans like "make a life, not a living." What is your purpose?

As we unpack God's Word this morning we find the Apostle Paul's mission statement. It is a mission statement that I dearly want for me and I dearly want for you: **For to me, to live is Christ, to die is gain**. Let's start with the second part – **to die is gain**. Paul writes these words while he is under house arrest in Rome. It beats prison but . . . wherever Paul went, whatever Paul did, his shadow was with him as well as a Roman's guard and the Roman guard's shadow. And he says, to die is gain. But understand, while Paul's circumstances may not have been the greatest, while he certainly must have felt the pressure of confinement having earlier in his life traveled the world, Paul is not saying "I give up. Life stinks." Paul is not depressed. Just the opposite. He can say "to die is gain" because of Jesus. He said in Romans 8:18 **I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us**. Paul knew that he was sinful, Romans 7 but Paul also knew he had the Savior from all of his sin, Romans 8:1. **Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**. Paul knew that there was victory in and through Christ alone. And so he knew his soul was going to heaven up death and his body would one day be reunited and transformed. He had a heavenly focus and purpose and not earthly focus and purpose. One lasts and one doesn't. His purpose transcended what he could see.

To die is gain. We often think of dying as losing. We say things like he lost his battle to heart disease. The disciples thought that Jesus had lost his battle against his enemies on the cross when he died. At the same time they thought they had lost their hope of a Savior as well. But Jesus didn't lose. He did take the full force of God's justice over our sins from our verbal sparrings, to . . . Jesus did die, but in doing so he redirected God's anger over our sins to himself and so purchased forgiveness for us and opened the doors to everlasting life in heaven. We know he didn't lose because Jesus rose from the dead just as he told his disciples. He won victory over sin and death. Philippians 3:20,21 **But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.**

Dying is gain. Think of that ugly looking caterpillar who spins a cocoon and becomes a free flying beautiful butterfly. We are going to have glorified bodies as well. DL Moody a pastor in the 19<sup>th</sup> century said: *Some day you will read in the papers that D.L. Moody of Northfield, is dead. Don't you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now; I shall have gone up higher, that is all, out of this old clay tenement into a house that is immortal-a body that death cannot touch, that sin cannot taint; a body fashioned like unto His glorious body.*

This result is available for all people but only those who believe that Jesus is their Savior will actually live with Jesus in heaven. Without Jesus there is no forgiveness, and death won't bring gain but pain as we stand before a holy God without a Savior. I am perplexed when people say of others who don't know God because they believe there is no God that they are in heaven or a better place. Have you ever grabbed anything out of the microwave with your bare hand only to find out indeed the microwave makes things very hot. That is an incomplete yet terrifying example of what it will be like for those who die without Jesus as their Savior. Again, I want to remind you that Jesus invites all people to receive his forgiveness and love.

What about you? What are you living for? What good if a person gains the world yet and yet forfeits his soul. Because you see you only live once. A super small portion of eternity is spent here on earth and when you die your soul keeps on living, the only question is where. And there are just two options, 1. To die is gain place (heaven) and 2. To die is pain place (hell) Paul knew that Jesus was his Savior and so to die was gain.

The Apostle Paul said, **To live is Christ.** He was still alive so that he could live for Christ, even while he was under house arrest. Phil 1:23-26 **I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; <sup>24</sup> but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. <sup>25</sup> Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, <sup>26</sup> so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.** Paul's goal was not only to be with Christ but to live for him. That was his purpose. Some of you, perhaps long time Christians are saying, I'm ready. I have been ready. Take me home. Dora was a member at the precious church I served. Super sharp. 104 years old. Wanted to die but since she didn't she prayed for us. You see we are not only to live with Christ but to live for Christ.

There are three major answers which for all practical purposes cover the range of options offered in the modern world. Likely the most common answer in the West is the answer that we see portrayed in many of our books, movies and TV shows which is a secular answer, which includes atheists, agnostics, naturalists and many humanists. Secularists believe there is no God. So from this way of thinking there is no God to consider, then purpose is up to each of us to decide and achieve for ourselves by ourselves. We don't discover it – we decide it. It makes no difference that there are differences among us so long as each of us has his or her own answer. There are no true or false answers. A little clear thinking, and the plain course of history, shows us that this is a faulty concept. First, there are important differences between different answers. Second, these differences make an important difference. And third, the differences make an important difference, not only for individuals, but for entire societies and civilizations.

The second is the answer that is the furthest away from most of our thinking because it comes from the East. The thinking is called "undifferentiated impersonal." I told you it was the furthest from most of us. This teaching is that when we try to find our purpose we are taking ourselves too seriously because we

are caught in an illusion. To seek fulfillment as individuals is to make matters worse and perpetuates the wheel of suffering. Seen from this perspective, freedom is not freedom to be an individual but freedom from individuality. So the purpose is to forget yourself and all people because everyone is just an illusion.

The final answer is the Biblical answer. From this perspective, the final reality is neither a discovery or impersonal, but a purpose given to us by the infinite personal God who has created us in his image and calls us by the gospel to have an eternal relationship with him. In other words, to live is Christ. We are to do what we were created to do. For example: I don't get on a fork and try to drive it down the street. That would be insanity. Since we are created by God to worship him that makes sense to do that and that is what brings us peace, contentment, joy and meaning. To live for Christ. Paul was a traveling missionary and author. But how do you do that? We live for Christ by serving people around us in love.

The reality is we are flawed in our condition and even when convinced of the truth we fall short of living for the greatest being and the greatest purpose we could ever live for. It is easy to lose focus. It is not even intentional. Sometimes isn't true, we get caught up passing time, checking our phone relentlessly, One things leads to another and we get distracted, preoccupied, pushed, pulled, overwhelmed, and we end up moving away from our purpose, from God. We put more energy to our kids making the team than our kids knowing their Savior. We put God's Word on the shelf or the living room floor with all the other books we want to read but don't' ever get around too. Paul wasn't perfect either. We will have our ups and downs. Our downs are our times to look to God for forgiveness not to try to cover it up or compare. Our ups are times to thank God for living in our heart.

There is one who knew his purpose and never failed. John 17: **I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. <sup>5</sup> And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.** He knew he was to in true love put God first in absolutely every scenario. And Jesus never sinned. He never said to himself, "No one will know." "I deserve this." "It feels good." "Everybody is doing it." He didn't ditch the disciples when they didn't get it the first time nor the millioneth time. He didn't get mad at God because he was having a bad day and tell God to go to take a flying leap. He didn't come off the cross when asked to do so and he could have. He died on purpose. He didn't stay in the grave though because he knew his purpose. His purpose was and is to be our Savior from ourselves, from the world and from death and Satan. His purpose is to wash us clean in our baptism, cover us in his righteousness in the Lord's Supper and present us to God radiant and beautiful. I thank God that Jesus is unshakeable in all things including his purpose.