

I'm going to preface the introduction to this message with a bit of a warning. Some of you may nod in agreement (with what I'm about to say), but there's a number who will be outraged by it. And if you are outraged, please stick with me, and hopefully we'll be on the same page by the end...

In our wealthy, humanistic country in which we live, generally, we value life far too highly. [There you go. I've said it – “We value life too highly”.] But, let me qualify that: We value **our own** lives, and the lives of our family; and the lives of our countrymen, far too highly...

*So, for instance, if you've ever purchased medication for your pet, you were probably shocked by how much it cost. Because you've noticed “That's a lot more than what I pay for a prescription for myself.” But, what most of us don't realise, is how much the tax payer, **subsidises** our prescriptions... In 2017, the pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, spent more than \$2 Billionⁱ on the top 3 medications (all used to treat hepatitis C). (which works out to > \$10000/patient/year).*

But that's a minor cost, compared to some therapies funded under the “Life Saving Drugs Program”, which *can cost more than \$200,000/per person/year, for life*ⁱⁱ...

We cry “foul”, if the government (taxpayer) doesn't pay the \$200000 to keep an individual person alive for a year, and yet that \$200000 could immunise thousands of 3rd World children, who continue to die of preventable diseases.

How much do we value a life??? And why do we value our own lives, so much more than everybody else's???

I don't think this has ever been as topical (for our generation) as what it has been over the last few months...

How much a life is worth, is something that Countries across the globe, have had to struggle with since Covid19 got a go-on...

And it's boiled down to,

- "What's the cost of containment?"
- How many jobs will be lost?
- How many businesses will be closed?
- How much debt is our country willing to accumulate?
- How many decades is it going to take, for our children/grandchildren to pay off that debt?

And then there's the unseen costs:

- What's the social cost?
- How many extra suicides will there be?
- Increase in Alcohol abuse
- Domestic violence
- Cost of other health concerns, because people left it longer to go to the doctor;
- Delay in surgery, and so the health system's way behind???

There's all these costs... And of course, our politicians like to weigh up the political costs... They want people to vote for

them again, and they worry how bad they look, if there is one, single death they could prevent, and didn't...

We like to think that life is priceless, and we can't put a cost on a life... But we do. We have to...

In 2019, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet published a paper entitled: "Best Practice Regulation Guidance Note: Value of Statistical Life". Which gives guidance to those who are working out how much is suitable to spend on a road to save a life, or how much to spend on a hospital to save a life, etc...

And the figure is \$4.9M. Or \$213000, to add a year to a person's life...

So there you go, regardless of what many of us believe, "You can't put a value on a human life", our country has done exactly that... *(It's all about how many \$ it's worth spending, to mitigate risk)*

But, how much do you value **your** life???? What's **your** life worth???

I was shocked by the fear that Covid19 caused – the fear of death... No, I wasn't surprised that **some** people were afraid, but I was surprised that **others** were.

We know that by far, those who are most at risk, are the elderly, and those who have serious underlying health

issues... And many people, were terrified. Many people **are** terrified... Even many people, who are not in the high risk category, are terrified beyond reason...

But that's not what shocked me.

BTW, in all this, I want to affirm that we all take appropriate social distancing measures and wash our hands properly, and make sure we don't go anywhere if we're sick... As Christians, we should be responsible citizens (and loving citizens) and care for those who are most at risk...

What **did** shock me, is how many people (who claim to be Christians), who were terrified that they might catch the virus ... (I was also shocked at the selfishness of hoarders. People of God should **not** be hoarders...)

But the **most** shocking thing, was to see Christians (and I mainly noticed it in those around about their 70's [at the stage of enjoying retirement], life's all good, but all of a sudden, the statistical probability of their death, increased)..... Even though the Lord had promised them 3-score years & 10, they'd reached it, and were confident of getting to 4-score... And some were terrified...

How do we value life? And some of you will probably be shocked that I'm talking about this, because throughout history:

- We Christians **do** have a very **high** value of life...
- It's Christians who heal the sick in Jesus' Name;
- It's Christians who built the first hospitals;
- It's Christians who opposed the evils of slavery;

- It's Christians who provide food to the starving;
- Today, it's mainly Christians who defend the unborn; and
- It's Christians who stand with the sick and the dying, against the dangers of Euthanasia.

As Christians, we **do** value life, and it's **right** to value life...
But.... What about our own lives???

Last week, we talked about having an eternal perspective, and this week, (For Disciples of Jesus), Paul puts 'physical life' and 'eternal life' into a proper perspective...

A famous verse (not so often quoted by those who follow a prosperity gospel), is V21

²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

What a brilliant summary, of **living**, with an eternal perspective...

And if that's the summary of the Christian perspective of life and death, the perspective of an unbeliever, can often be summed up as "*To live, is for me, and to die, is to lose everything.*"...

And yet, the way some Christians fear death, and hold on to life for all they're worth, that's very much their motto...

And my prayer, is that today, the Holy Spirit would take us from the worldly perspective: "Life is for me; and to die is to

lose everything”; and all of the selfishness that that entails, and that the Holy Spirit, would give us the attitude of Paul:
²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

OK, so as Christians, the pinnacle of our life – what we’re aiming for, is death... When we die, we get to go to be with Christ... There’s nothing better than that – That’s what our faith is looking forwards to – being in Glory with Christ....

And yet, with that in mind, some folk become ‘so heavenly minded, they’re of no earthly use’... Alright, they view this life, as a mere waiting room to get ‘em to heaven, and they’re just killing time, until they can be with Jesus....

That itself, is a ‘spiritual selfishness’, (in a way)... “I’ll live through this life until I can be rid of it, and be with Jesus”... ‘So heavenly minded, they’re of no earthly use’

But what about the example of the life of Paul: Even when Paul was in prison, he didn’t view that prison as his waiting room, until he gets to be with Jesus... As a disciple of Jesus, Paul’s life (even while he was in prison), was to be **full** of life, for Jesus...

But he was very honest about his turmoil... **If** he had the choice, what would he choose??? **My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.**

But the flip side of it, is : “**Not** dying (just yet), is necessary for others”... While Paul continued to live, he could continue to preach. While he lived, he could continue to be a witness for Jesus, and he could continue to encourage his brothers and sisters in Christ....

And that (my friends), is why Christianity, can never become some kind of ‘suicide cult’. Yep, the truth is, if life ends, we get to go to be with Jesus (which is the best thing)... But God has a purpose for us, while we live... Discipleship (following Jesus), is a way of selflessness... - We live for the sake of Christ, and we live for the sake of others.

And so,
No matter how much pain you’re in; (Physical / Emotional / Relationship / psychological) No matter how much pain you’re in, we suffer **through** the torment, for the sake of Christ...

But that isn’t something we have to do on our own...

Paul knew the Philippian church (and others) were praying for him, and for his deliverance... And sometimes you might feel all alone... You are **not** alone. When your brothers and sisters in Christ, know your need, they will pray for you... And if you’re somebody who is listening to this today, and you are tormented, and you are suffering, don’t try and go through it alone. If you’re connected to a local church (and I hope you are – you need to be connected to your local church), share your need with them, and ask them to pray. And share it with our church, and we’ll pray for you...

And Paul said: ¹⁹ for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance,

Paul knew, that God was going to answer those prayers, and that he was going to be delivered. He didn't know what that deliverance was going to look like though. He didn't know if he was going to be released from prison (like Philippi), or whether he would be executed (which he eventually was)... But either way, Paul's faith, and his eternal perspective, understood this as deliverance...

What's the worst they could do to him – Kill him? Well, he'd go straight to be with Jesus – Delivered!... And so Jesus could deliver Paul through release, or deliver him through death. Either way, Delivered!!!

I'm reminded of Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego. When they refused to bow down and worship Nebuchadnezzar, and he threatened to throw them into the furnace, they said:

Daniel 3: (ESV)

¹⁷ If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. ¹⁸ But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

Alright, there's the faith. God **will** deliver us out of your hands. He is **able** to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace. But even if he doesn't, we **will** be delivered. There's the faith.

The pinnacle for them, wasn't this earthly life – the pinnacle for them, was to be delivered into eternity with God... And that's the same faith that Paul had...

But that doesn't mean it's going to be an easy ride. It takes a lot of courage...

I do hope you realise, that Christianity isn't for wimps. To be a follower of Jesus, takes immense courage ... Paul says: **with full courage now as always Christ will be honoured in my body, whether by life or by death.**

You know, it may seem all very 'academic' for us, to be considering this question now. "If I was in the position of Paul, would I remain faithful to Jesus???" And you might feel "I don't think I'd be strong enough."

The thing is, we don't have to be strong enough. We just have to have courage. And when we have courage, The Lord will be our strength. Jesus promised us that He would fill us with His Holy Spirit. And there's one thing we can be sure of – Holy Spirit will never deny Jesus. He will keep us faithful – as long as we trust in Him and have courage, we can have every confidence and determination, that we will never deny Him.

Righto:

So, whether we live, or whether we die, the point is, for Christ to be honoured **in** bodies...

How do we honour Christ in death? We honour Him by **not** grasping onto this life, as if it **is** the most valuable thing to us. And we honour Christ by remaining faithful to him, even if it leads to death...

But how do we honour Christ in life??? Well, Paul summed it up as “fruitful labour”...

Sometimes the Christian life gets presented as some kind of glorious **inactivity** of the redeemed... But it’s nothing of the sort. A life that honours Jesus Christ isn’t at all, a life of glorious inactivity... If it’s better to die and be with Jesus, why do we live now??? Well, it’s for the benefit of others. “Fruitful labour”.

The Lord has given each of us gifts, and we are to be using these gifts for Him.

And He has given us time. And we are to use this time for Him:

- Every hour that we live, is another opportunity for us to share the gospel with somebody we know, or somebody we don’t know for that matter.
- It’s an opportunity for us to encourage other Christians in their walk with God;
- It’s an opportunity for us to give of ourselves, for the benefit of others

What are the major plans that you have for your life??? When you make the big decisions, do you plan for:

- Schooling

- Education;
- Career;
- Family
- Farm succession planning
- Saving up for retirement;
- And maybe that's the pinnacle – enjoying your retirement;
- And then when I've got nothing left, I'm old, I'm tired, and then I die...

And it's assumed, "I'll just fit God around all that"...

Now, I want you to consider, (in the big picture stuff), how different is your life plan, from that of an unbeliever???

Paul's whole purpose for "remaining in the flesh" (as he put it), was for others – for their **progress and joy in the faith...**

How many big life decisions, do we make, where that even gets a look-in??? "I'm going to make this major life decision, because I know it's necessary for you - **for your progress and joy in the faith.**

Righto: So that's Paul's plan – to honour Christ. In life, and in death, he wants to honour Christ... But, what's his hope for the Philippians?

Pretty much the same thing, really: V27

27 Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.....

That's his hope. And that's a pretty worth-while sort of a hope, isn't it... I know, that's my hope for everyone who's listening to this today – that your manner of life, would be worthy of the gospel of Christ... And it's my hope for myself – that **my** manner of life, would be worthy of the Gospel of Christ.

What does that look like?

1. A firm faith.

When word gets back to him from the Philippian church, Paul wants to hear that they are standing firm in the faith, and that **nothing** has distracted them from it.

2. A unified faith

He wants to hear that they're not at loggerheads with one another – that they are united in faith. (following Jesus together)

3. Fruitful labour

He wants to hear that they are striving together (**side by side**) for the faith of the gospel

You see, it's not only the leader – it's not only Paul whose life was to be filled with fruitful labour. He wanted to hear that that whole church were **striving** for the Gospel...

We preachers sometimes take extra special care, that we don't tell people to "work harder" "be better" "Be nicer" "Be better behaved"... You know why? It's because we're dead-scared that somebody might accuse us of preaching a works-based gospel, when we Protestants proclaim a faith-based/grace-based gospel...

But you know what? I reckon we preachers need to stop being scared of what the Grace-Nazis might think about us. Because "Yes", we are saved by Grace. And no, we're not saved by works... But today I have a word for disciples of Jesus who are already saved, And it's the word of God through the Apostle Paul. And that word is "**strive**". Let's you and I be people saved by grace, who are **standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel**

4. A manner of life worthy of the Gospel of Christ, is **Not being frightened by opponents.**

Now, I want you to notice, that Paul **doesn't** say that when we're living for Christ, we won't have any opponents – He doesn't say that, does he...

But he **does** say to : **not frightened in anything by your opponents.**

Why do we even have opponents to the Gospel? The Gospel's good news. Why's anyone opposed to that??? And it's a private thing (isn't it?). My faith is **my** faith. Why should it affect others???

Well the thing is, "Faith isn't private". I challenge you to explain to me, how you can both "Love God" and "Love your neighbour", and keep your faith private... Jesus told us to let our light shine. He told us to go into the whole world, and to make disciples... Now, I don't know about you, but that doesn't sound very private to me.

But even so, why do unbelievers **hate** it when Disciples of Jesus stand firm in their faith and when they live lives, that **are** worthy of the Gospel??? When we live faithfully for Jesus Christ, many **unbelievers**, are deeply offended by this. Do you know why???

It's because it's a sign for them, not only of our salvation, but of their destruction. Every time the gospel is preached, and we're reminded of our eternal salvation in Christ Jesus, unbelievers are reminded of their eternal damnation...

And every time you do the right thing, an unbeliever feels judged by the wrong that **they** do. Whenever your behaviour is evidence of the eternal perspective you hold, an unbeliever becomes more aware of the shallowness of their perspective, that's limited to this earthly life...

And this is especially so, when we are not afraid of those who oppose the Gospel. Paul says: **This is a clear sign to**

them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.

Yeah!!! There is **no** need to be afraid!!!

We have a special privilege (as disciples of Jesus)... Not everyone gets to do this. It's a special privilege. It's a special honour... Unbelievers miss out on it, But it's **our** privilege...

V²⁹ For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake

Do we understand this??? When we suffer for the sake of Christ, this isn't at all, a sign that we've taken a wrong turn... It doesn't at all mean that our faith wasn't big enough, and so we're now suffering... To suffer for Jesus, is a privilege...

This week, I read the story of a 22YO lady in India, who converted from Hinduism, to follow Jesus. And her village turned on her. She was beaten, and kicked out of her village. But she's ended up going to a Bible School. And when asked what she would like to say to Christians in Australia, she said:

“Don't be afraid when persecution comes to you. It's part of Christian life. It's a privilege to be persecuted. Don't become sad or discouraged.”

“Please pray that God will help me live up to my vision: to share His word with unbelievers. Especially in my village, but also other places where God’s word is opposed. I also have a deep desire that my father and brother come to faith.”ⁱⁱⁱ

It makes it real, doesn’t it??? And you can read stories like that on the Open Doors web site.

And, these people are an inspiration to us, as Paul was to the Philippian church.

How much, do we value life???

Are we living a short-term, worldly perspective “I live for me, and when I die, I’ve lost everything?”

Or are we living with an eternal perspective. “to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

Let’s pray:

Heavenly Father,

We want to thank You, that you’ve given us a glorious eternity to look forward to.

And yet Lord, we confess, that many times, and in many ways, we are not any different to the world around us.

We get fixated on short-term stuff, and hold too tightly to this life.

Lord, our prayer, is that You would fill us with Your Holy Spirit,
That for us, **“to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”**

Lord, while we live, may we live lives of fruitful labour, striving to serve You.

Give us courage, that we would share the gospel, and encourage other Christians in the Name of Jesus.

And Lord, even when persecutions come, give us strength, that we would not be deterred...

Lord, we long to be with You, but we ask, that until that time, we would live as Your faithful witnesses, on this Earth.

Amen.

ⁱ <https://ajp.com.au/news/australias-10-expensive-drugs/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.nps.org.au/australian-prescriber/articles/the-challenge-of-costly-drugs>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.opendoors.org.au/persecuted-christians/blog/its-a-privilege-to-be-persecuted-india/>