

CONFIRMATION

For To Me, To Live Is Christ, And To Die Is Gain.

Text: Phil 1:21

Suggested Hymns:

301, 296, 297, 473, 371, 282, 340

1) Life is important

2) Christ, The Beginning, Centre, And End
Of Life For The Christian

3) Our life's story

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Philippians 1:21, ***21 For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*** (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Boys and girls like to imitate heroes. It is a good thing to imitate men and women who are worth imitating.

Dear Simon and Benjamin, this morning, on your confirmation day, as you take an important step in your spiritual life, I want to hold up before you a great man and suggest that you ought to be like him. I would suggest that you make him your spiritual hero and imitate his good qualities.

The hero that I would hold up to you is a man who surrendered himself to Christ and promised to always serve Christ. Like you, he was a Christian. His name was Paul. He is a real Christian hero. When you, like Paul, have learned to say, ***For to me, to live is Christ***, then you will also experience the blessing which was his.

You have learned in your confirmation instructions that it is the Holy Spirit who leads us into the knowledge of truth and helps us understand and accept it.

Remember the words, *"I believe that I cannot by my own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, and sanctified and kept me in the true faith."*

May God's Holy Spirit, therefore, now completely, take over your hearts and minds, as we meditate together on this Word of God before us, so that you may

never forget these words, but always remember what they should mean to you as you repeat them after that great hero of the Christian faith, *For to me, to live is Christ*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Life Is Important

To live — that is the important thing. You have most of your life still ahead of you. You have lived only thirteen or fourteen years of it. You want to live it, and live it right. You want to live it so that when God calls you to account, you can say more than, *“Here, Lord, is my life. I have lived it a whole lot better than many other people have lived theirs. I have tried to do my best.”*

That is not enough. You want to be able to say, *“Lord, I have lived my life with You and for You. I have been faithful to You. For to me to live meant Christ.”* Of course, you will not be able to say this either, because you will have to plead Christ’s blood and righteousness for your justification. But in such faith you should always strive to live to Him.

Let us look at the text a little more closely. What does it mean, *“For to me, to live is Christ?”* To begin with, what did it mean to Paul?

Christ, The Beginning Of Paul’s Life

In the first place, Christ was the Beginning of life for St. Paul. You have probably heard that *“Life begins at forty.”*

Paul would say, *“That is all wrong, Life begins with Christ.”* Real living begins when Christ comes into a person’s life. Paul says that he was dead until Christ was born in him by the power of the Holy Spirit. Every Christian has had two births. The first he had when he was born physically into the world. We celebrate this birthday.

The second birth he had is the spiritual one when he was born into the Kingdom of Christ. The Bible calls this being *“born again.”*¹ It takes place when Christ comes into a person’s life by the power of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel.

This spiritual rebirth took place for most of you at the time of your Baptism, and the life created there was continued and kept growing through your being instructed in the Word of God by parents and teachers, or anybody else who taught you to know Jesus Christ, or helped to bring you closer to Him. Your

first birthday is worthless in the sight of God without the second one, which brought Christ and His life into your heart.

Paul said that he did not really begin living until Christ came into his life. We might ask him, *“Do you really mean this? You had a remarkable life even before your rebirth. You were educated at the feet of the great Gamaliel. You had many advantages in life. Do you really mean that your life before you knew Christ was unimportant?”*

And Paul says, *“It was not only unimportant, but absolutely worthless.”* To describe his life without Christ, Paul uses a word that means “garbage” in our language. That is what he thought of his life before Christ found him and he found Christ.

Christ, The Centre Of Life For Paul

Christ was not only the Beginning of Paul’s life, He was also the Centre of his life. He continued to live for and with Christ, and Christ continued to live in him. Christ was the Purpose of his living.

When Christ came into Paul’s life on the road to Damascus, for that was the beginning of Christ’s life with Paul, the first question Paul asked was, *“Lord, what do You want me to do?”*² And what Christ wanted him to do Paul did. That was what he meant when he said, *For to me, to live is Christ.* Christ was the secret Motive, the Purpose of his living, the Reason why he was glad to be alive, the Reason why his life amounted to something. He lived to Christ.

Christ, the End of Paul’s Life

Christ was not only the Beginning of Paul’s life and its Centre, but also its End. When he looked forward to his death, whom did he see? Christ! *“For to me, to live is Christ,”* he said, *“and to die is gain,”* that is, *“more Christ.”*

2. Christ, The Beginning, Centre, And End Of Life For The Christian

Dear Simon, Benjamin, and everybody gathered here today, I trust that Christ is the Beginning, the Centre, and the End of your life, too. If that has not been the case before, then I trust that God’s Holy Spirit will this day give you grace to give yourselves, body and soul, to Christ.

As you kneel at the altar and receive His blessing, may you at the same time make this a moment when you pledge complete allegiance to your Saviour.

A Renewal Of This Pledge

Dear Simon and Benjamin, today does not bring a new pledge of allegiance for you, but a renewal of that pledge. You were given to Christ in Baptism by your parents. You have already surrendered yourselves to Christ. You have received Him as your Saviour from sin. In your stead, Christ fulfilled the Law perfectly and suffered the punishment that you deserve. He died for you on the Cross that you might live. You have already acknowledged Him as your Lord and Master so that with Paul you already ask, *“Lord, what do You want me to do?” Lord, I am Yours, body and soul!*”

You may not be able to remember the time when you did not know Jesus as Saviour and acknowledge Him as Lord. Through your parents, your Sunday school teachers, your brothers or sisters, or someone else you heard about your Saviour and believe in Him. You cannot remember when you did not know Jesus.

Simon and Benjamin, through the course of your confirmation instruction you were brought closer to the Saviour through His Word. You have learnt the substance of the Christian faith.

You have been through *Luther’s Small Catechism*, learnt Bible texts and hymn verses. You have come to a greater understanding of the Word of God.

The first thing that *Luther’s Small Catechism* teaches us is the authority of the Word of God. Once this is established everything else follows. Next you learnt about the Law and the Gospel. The Law ‘shows us our sin’ and the Gospel ‘shows us our Saviour.’ This was followed by the 10 commandments. You now know how to determine if something is right or wrong.

We don’t judge things by our own standards or by what the crowd is doing but by what God says. By God’s standards. Also by the same Ten Commandments you also know what pleases God. God’s will for us is revealed in the commandments.

This was followed by a study of the Apostles’ Creed. You know that you were created by God, for God, to live according to His purpose. Your life has

purpose and meaning. You know what God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit has done for you and is still doing for you.

You have learnt the great joys of Justification by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith - which is central to the Scriptures. We must firmly hold onto this teaching because it is the most important doctrine of the Christian faith. I hope that everybody here today has a *Luther's Small Catechism* and will look it up at home later. The church falls or stands by this question. It is question 186.

Your lessons continued with the study of prayer, the Lord's Prayer, Baptism, Confession, the Office of the Keys and the Sacrament of the Altar.

As you grow older your appreciation of the Bible, Catechism, and Hymnbook will increase. As life continues there will be ups and downs, but there is one thing that will not change and that is the Word of God. You learned to love it, and to love Him.

You have resolved to follow Christ and this following Christ must continue all throughout your lives. Christ says in John 8:31-32, ***"If you [continue] in My word, you are My disciples indeed. ³² And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."*** And in Revelation 2:10 we are told, ***Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.***

I trust and have prayed, and I know the members of this congregation have that prayer in their hearts this morning, that none of you will renew your baptismal vow and pledge your allegiance to Christ, merely by word of mouth, but that you, both of you, will make yours a sincere, earnest, real, heart-meant vow. Then to you to live will be Christ.

Whenever some great ambition seizes a person, that ambition influences all that he thinks and says and does. If an ambition to become a doctor seizes a young man, he reads about doctors, he talks about doctors, and he thinks about being a doctor.

When a young man and woman are about to be married, they think about it, talk about it, are influenced by it. It is the great thing in their lives for the moment.

In the same way, when Christ is the Beginning, the Centre, and the End of your life, you will think of Christ, talk about Him, and do something for Him.

Your attitude toward Him will influence your thinking, your speaking, and your doing. He will be your very Life, the Reason for your living.

Some people are afraid to follow a religion which means and involves so much. They are afraid that they will have to give up too much if Christ comes to be their 'All in All.' Paul gave up a great deal when he became a Christian, when he took Christ into his life, but he tells us that what he gave up was not to be compared with what he received in return.

He tells us that he only really began to live when Christ came into his life and that he was looking forward to something still better, namely, fullness of life with Christ in heaven.

3. Our Life's Story

Let us try an experiment. Everybody here, use your imagination and take a blank piece of paper, and write the story of your life honestly and frankly by completing this statement,

"For to me, to live is ..." Put down what life, or living is to you.

Think about that for a few moments. *"For to me, to live is ..."*

Here are some of the things that some people may write:

For to me, to live is — money

For to me, to live is — pleasure

For to me, to live is — fame

For to me, to live is — ambition

For to me, to live is — my job

For to me, to live is — my family

For to me, to live is — myself, etc.

But *For to me, to live is — Christ* is what Paul said.

Now, after you have written down what life is to you, write down the story of your death, what death will mean to you, by completing the statement,

"For to me, to die is ..."

Paul could complete the statement by saying, *For to me ... to die is gain.* i.e., to live is Christ, and to die means a gain of Christ, more Christ.

But that does not work with any of the other things mentioned before. If to live is money, then to die is not gain of it, but loss of it. If to live is worldly pleasures, then to die is not gain but loss of it. etc.

Only when we can say, “*For to me, to live is Christ,*” can we say “*To die is gain.*”

Therefore, why should we waste our time on a life that is a total loss at its end when, instead, we can live a life that is satisfying here on earth and gain when it ends?

This is the life offered to us by our Saviour Jesus Christ, who died that we might live a satisfying life now and an eternal life in heaven hereafter.

Dear Simon and Benjamin, this is the life to which you dedicate yourselves today, in your Confirmation Vows. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ John 3:3

² Acts 9:6