

Christ Our Goal

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, Watermark. It's an amazing day outside, and it's just a privilege just to be able to worship with you this morning.

I want to ask you a question this morning. What do you really want in life? If you had the bucket list of all the things that you want to do before you die, what would be on your list?

I have a few. Some of them are very mundane. I would like to have more time to be able to read, do sport, and play the guitar. I'd like to have a bigger flat.

I'd like to write a book. I'd like to travel the world more. I'd like to become a famous rock guitarist. That is not going to happen. I'd like to become well-known and well-respected.

I don't know about you. I don't know what's on your bucket list of either the mundane or the slightly more extraordinary, perhaps.

[1 : 1 1] But as we come to looking at the book of Philippians today, we're looking at what does it mean to live life well?

What does it mean to live life in a broken world well? What I want you to remember is this letter to the Philippians is Paul writing from a context where he is languishing in a dark dungeon.

Now, if you think about prison nowadays, remove the ideas of prison that you might have where people have got satellite television and all those things you read about in the newspapers.

This is a prison where it is filled with prisoners. It's overcrowding is everywhere. It is most of the time dark.

At night, it is pitch black. You can see nothing. And you do everything in this one room with all the other prisoners. That means all your, and it's, forgive me for vulgarity, but all your excrement and urine stays in the room.

[2 : 2 1] The smell must have been horrific. And in these conditions, many people died. And so the bodies of the dead would be piled up on the side of the room until the guards could be bothered to take it away.

That's the situation that Paul is writing in at this particular letter. And Paul is there because he's been preaching this message, this gospel message about the death and resurrection of Jesus.

And he's got a bit of time on his hand. There's not a lot to do in there. And so Paul begins to do what you, I'm sure, would always do if you have some time. He begins to do a bit of accounting. He begins to stop and consider his life.

He begins to do a bit of a life audit at this point. And the questions he's asking and he's thinking about and reflecting are, how do I live a life that's worth living?

A life that's truly meaningful. A life of no regrets. And each one of us has to grapple with those questions. What is it that makes life worth living?

[3 : 3 2] So Paul starts off this section in the letter. And he starts off with a command, which is rejoice in the Lord. Which is an amazing command if you remember the situation he's in.

But joy is what Paul is all about in this letter. Joy is what Paul is all about. A life worth living is a life of knowing joy. I have four points to think about what does it mean to live a life worth living?

A life of joy. The first one is how to make a loss in life. The second one is how to make a profit. The third is how to know Christ. And then the fourth is how to live the cross and resurrection.

How to make a loss. How to make a profit. How to know Christ. And how to live the cross and resurrection. So first of all, how to make a loss. If you read just the first couple of verses, Paul is talking to the Philippians here.

And he's saying that there are some people who will try and convince you that there are ways to live which will actually make you a loss in your life. In this particular context, there are people in the church who are saying, if you want to be a good Christian, if you want to be someone who is okay with God, if you want to be acceptable, if you want to feel like you're worth something, you need to become Jewish.

[4 : 57] And that involved doing certain rituals, cutting certain bits of the body which shouldn't be cut. And God will then accept you and God will bless you if you just do these things.

And Paul is horrified by this suggestion. He calls them dogs, evildoers, mutilators of the flesh. He says, this is crazy.

If you want to put your confidence in doing certain things, in chalking up certain merits that you think it will make you acceptable, it will make you worth something, it will make you feel like you're okay.

He says it's crazy. But he says, okay, well, it's crazy to trust in these things. But what I'm going to tell you is, let's play this little game for a little while, shall we? Let's play the game that these people are telling you about.

And do you know what? Verse 4, he says, I've got more reasons for why I will win this game than any of the others. So, remember, this is a religious context he's talking in.

[6 : 05] And he says, he basically gives his resume, which would leave everybody else drooling at the fact of this incredible resume that he has in this religious context.

If this was Hong Kong today, I think he might have said something like this. I was given a multi-million dollar inheritance from the day I was born. In fact, my dad is Li Ka-Shing himself.

But in spite of that, I worked real hard to get into Harvard. And I graduated the top of my year. I also got a PhD, and I started the foremost company in my field in Southeast Asia.

I worked harder than any employee. I've been three years without holiday to get my company to where it's the best performing company on the stock exchange. And as he's doing his little audit, he puts all these in the profit list.

Look at that. That means I'm worth something. Give me some respect here, will you? And he says, he then says something extraordinary.

[7 : 19] He says, whatever were gains to me, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

Against all these achievements that everybody else would die for, he gets a big red marker, and he puts a big cross next to all of them and writes the letters, loss.

Against them all. But not only that, then he starts thinking about not just the past of what's happened, but then the future. All the things that he would love to have.

All those things on your bucket list. All those things that you think that would just make life so great. And what does he do? He puts a big red cross against all of them and writes the letters, loss.

And at this moment, it looks like he's in serious life bankruptcy because it seems like everything that's worth living, he said, that's loss. But then in the gains column, he says, knowing Christ.

[8 : 34] He says, what is more, I consider everything, everything a loss. Everything, children who sleep through the night, loss.

Time alone with my spouse, loss. Graduate with a good degree, loss. My boss's approval, loss. Planting several churches, loss. Compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus.

You see, what he's not saying is those things are necessarily bad. He's not saying that. But he's making a comparison. And he's saying, any of your achievements, any of your desires, which may be perfectly legitimate, if you place them up against knowing Christ, they're a loss.

In fact, he goes on to say this. I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whose sake I've lost all things.

I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ. That word rubbish is an incredibly strong word. It's literally the word dung or crap.

[9 : 54] And Paul knows what he's talking about because he's surrounded by crap in the prison. And he's looking all around and he says, in comparison to knowing Christ, all those other things is just crap.

Now, I don't know if you remember the first time you got a mobile phone. I remember mine. My first phone, it was a brick. Do you remember those? And it was one of those things that you have to press the keys so many times that you think you're going to get arthritis after a couple of months.

You know what I mean? But I was excited to get this because it meant I could go outside of the house and make phone calls. Incredible.

But now, I have an iPhone. As I look back and you come to me and say, Chris, which do you think is better? I can give you the brick.

Or I can give you the latest iPhone. What am I going to choose? I'm going to say, man, the brick was just crap. Compared to what is something so much better.

[11 : 10] And the thing is, Paul is not just doing this in theory. He's not just sitting down the list and thinking, oh, yeah. I think in total, on balance, Jesus is a bit better.

He says, I have actually lost all things. He's actually lost everything.

All those things that you might think were great, the achievements. He's sitting in this prison, this hell hole. And he can even there, say, being stripped of all the comfort, the reputation, the dignity that he had before.

And he can stay. After doing my balance sheet, following Jesus was the most profitable investment I've ever made. And it's so much better than all the comfort that I had before.

Wow. And we might look at this and think, man, Paul's a bit of a nutter. He's a bit crazy, isn't he? Because Paul's got this totally different perspective on life.

[12 : 18] And if we stop to think about it, I don't think he's so crazy after all. Think about it. It's two in the morning. Your three-month-old baby starts crying.

You spring out of bed. You turn to your spouse. And you say, don't worry, dear. I've got a degree from Harvard. I can cope with this one. You float automatically into the child's bedroom with the calm of a Buddhist monk.

And there, your three-month-old who, if he's born in Hong Kong, has probably already been able to recite at least three sonnets of Shakespeare. He looks at you and he says, respect, mom.

I just heard you got promotion. I'm going to stop crying now because I think you're cool. You get to work in the morning and your boss shouts at you.

He tells you, you've got 55 deadlines in the next 15 minutes. The panic's beginning to rise. You're beginning to stress out. But then you remember, thank goodness I bought that Gucci bag yesterday.

[13 : 20] I'm worth something now. I can handle this. I can have peace and joy in my heart without worrying. Or maybe you get that call from the doctor.

And he says, I'm sorry, it's cancer. Where does financial security leave you then?

Where does the respect from the peers that we crave leave you then? Because these events in life can sometimes give us a perspective which Paul has got about what is truly valuable in life.

And often we're so out of touch with reality that in a world which is full of struggles and trials, we think so many other things can give us peace and joy and confidence and a sense of being okay.

And Paul says, if you make those your goal, you're going to make a loss in your life. That's the first thing, how to make a loss. Second thing, how to make a profit.

[14 : 31] Read it again. The surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ and be found in him.

Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ. The righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

What Paul is saying is, there are so many things that we are striving for, that we think will make us worth something. They're like, you know when you, on the flag days, when you give money to someone, and then they put this big sticker on you.

And you can go around kind of feeling pretty good and say, Hey, good person. See, I've given some money. But Paul is saying, we have a bigger sticker placed on us, which says you're acceptable.

You're okay in God's sight. And it's nothing to do with what you have done. It's nothing to do with your list of achievements, or even how good you've been in church.

[15 : 36] It's all to do with Christ. He is your sticker. Your label, which says, I'm acceptable in God's sight.

I don't have to go around proving myself to other people, because I'm already approved. I can be free to say no, when I know I should say no, because I'm not in the grip of wanting other people's approval in my life.

I don't earn it. It's all in Christ. And even more than that, knowing Christ means that you can be stripped of everything in your life. You can be frustrated.

You can be disappointed when things don't work out your way. And yet, he says, you can know the joy that I know, because I know Christ in whatever situation you find yourself in.

If you walk through your life and gain everything, but you don't know Christ, at the end of the game, you'll be bankrupt. If you walk through your life and lose everything, but know Christ, at the end of the game, you have everything.

[16 : 47] You make a profit if your goal is to know Christ, to be in relationship with him, to seek to pursue him more than anything else.

How to make a loss? Chase after anything other than Christ. How to make a profit? Make Christ your goal. How to know Christ? If at this point you're not already shocked, because he's turning our world upside down, Paul's about to blow your categories even more.

Because if I was to ask you, as a Christian, as someone who God has already said you're approved, how do I get to know Christ more? How do I develop my relationship with him?

And normally, we would say something like, read your Bible and pray. And those are right, because in the Bible, God reveals himself, and we come to know his character.

But Paul would say, just doing that is insufficient. There is something more. Read this. This is incredible. Verse 10.

[18 : 02] I want to know Christ. Yes. And that means, in other words, what I'm saying is, I want to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so somehow attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

If you want to know Christ, there's two things Paul says here. You need to know the power of Christ's resurrection now in your life, and you need to know the participation in his sufferings now.

If you have those two things, it will make you more like Jesus in his death, with the result that you will know the joy of future resurrection.

So let's just work. What is he actually saying? What Paul understands is this. We live in an in-between time. What the Bible calls the last days.

The time between when Jesus died and rose again, and the time between when Jesus is going to come back and is going to raise those who followed him from the dead to be with him in satisfying full life, like we were singing earlier.

[19 : 15] It's what theologians call the already and not yet. Already, Jesus has come. You have forgiveness of sins. You can be free from the slavery that holds us.

You have resurrection power to love, to be patient, to endure, to forgive, to be everything that God has called you to be now.

You have a taste of that future resurrection now. It's a bit like ordering dim sum. You know, you go to dim sum, and you order all these things on the tick list, and then the chasil bao comes first.

The chasil bao's great. It's a taste of what's to come. It's great in and of itself. But there's so much more that's there to come. And that's what life is like. There is an already.

We already have. But there's also a not yet. We don't see the full measure of that life, of that resurrection that God says, one day we will enjoy with the fullness of life.

[20 : 23] There's still screaming kids. There are still health problems. There are still very annoying people. There are still bills to pay. There's still backstabbing. There's still all those things.

So how do we live in this in-between time? What Paul is saying is here. The pattern of the Christian life now is a pattern of the cross and the resurrection.

It's cross followed by resurrection. What he means is this. We want to be so intimately identified with Jesus that we want to be so close to him in relationship that we will follow him wherever he goes and where he has gone.

That the pattern of his life becomes the pattern of our life. That means if you want to get to resurrection, you need to go through the cross.

Do you remember Jesus says, anyone who does not have sufficient comfort and blessings is not worthy to be my disciple. Does he say that?

[21 : 35] And he says, anyone who's not willing to take up their cross and follow me is not willing. It's not worthy of being my disciple.

That's really tough language. And I think we forget some of that. Well, because we're following a crucified suffering savior.

If we're to know him, our life pattern will display similar sufferings. What do I mean by that? Suffering is simply the taking away of bad things or good things that the world offers for our enjoyment.

Reputation, esteem among peers, job, money, spouse, sexual life, children, friends, strength, sight, hearing, success. When these things are taken away by force, by circumstance or by choice, we suffer.

And the problem is, most of us, including myself, we want resurrection, full resurrection now. I want to have comfort now.

[22 : 43] I want to have all the blessings of God now. I think God should bless my business so that it prospers and flourishes. And he should make my way so smooth that I can just sail on through.

And if it doesn't happen, then I feel, God, you're letting me down here. Maybe you're just not good enough here. And folks says, God hasn't promised that.

There is power, resurrection power, to live in the suffering now, to live in the difficulties, the struggles of life now. But there's an already and there's a not yet.

Now, does God give blessings now? Yeah, absolutely. So when you get that job promotion, when you pass those exams, praise God. But don't put your trust in those. Don't put your confidence.

Have open hands. Because if you make those your goal, you will lose the joy of knowing Christ. We've got to be careful.

[23 : 46] Paul is not saying, he's not kind of some masochist who enjoys pain. You know, it's like if you have two choices, there's a hard one and a difficult one. I've got to choose the hard one because God wants me to suffer.

He's not saying that. He's saying, he's not saying that because suffering is not Paul's goal. Knowing Christ is Paul's goal.

And because he knows that Christ went to the cross, he knows that he has to follow him. He's saying, Jesus is my goal and I would give anything to know him. It doesn't matter if God chooses to take any of those things away.

Or where I have choices in life, where following Christ would mean I lose any of the other blessings in my life, I would choose Christ.

When they ask you in your job to flagrantly lie about something or get fired, Paul would say, I know what I'm going to choose. When there's people that you know you should be, God wants you to reach out to, but you don't feel in the mood and you really don't like them.

[24 : 58] Paul would say, I know what I'm going to choose. I'm going to choose Christ, no matter what the cost. Fiona and I did a long distance relationship for a year.

I was in the UK. She was in Hong Kong. Skype was our saviour. We fixed a regular time to talk to each other and we couldn't wait to talk.

There was a seven or eight hour time difference between them. And sometimes, though, it would be inconvenient. Sometimes there would be things that I would want to do, but actually, because we were going to talk together, I chose not to do those things.

There were times when I was willing to sacrifice certain things which, ordinarily, I would have wanted to do because I wanted to talk to her. I wanted to spend time.

And the sacrifice wasn't that big a sacrifice because I wanted to get to know her better. But you see, I wasn't looking to have a Skype relationship with my wife for the rest of my life.

[26 : 06] There came a day when I got on a plane and I saw her face to face. And I tell you, face to face is so much better than Skype. Skype is good.

Face to face beats it hands down. In the same way, we're living in this in-between time where knowing Christ requires sacrifice.

It requires pain. But I'm not suffering because I want to suffer. It's just I'm suffering because the relationship with Christ is what consumes me.

And I know one day I'll be resurrected from the dead and I will see my Savior face to face. And face to face is so much better.

Many of you know this in your life. Many of you know that when all is stripped away in your lives, sometimes those are the times when you have come to know God in so much of a deeper way.

[27 : 14] Now, some of you have gone through hard times and difficulties. And Paul knows the struggle to keep going. Read verse 12 to 14.

Not that I've already attained all of this or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it.

But one thing I do, forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards.

Paul's saying, I'm not yet there. I don't know Christ as much as I want to. But, and then he says, he changes the analogy from an accountant to an athlete.

And for Paul, he would have seen the Roman Olympic Games. And at the Olympic Games, if you ran in the race and you won, you would get a wreath around your head of celery.

[28 : 19] Great. You can't even replenish the calories that you've spent on the race itself. Now imagine if Usain Bolt, who has trained for year after year, who has got up early in the morning, who's gone through pain, gets to the Olympic race.

He runs the 100 meters in world record time. At the end, everyone's saying, Usain, that was amazing. And then he goes up on the podium.

And there, the presentation takes place. And they say, Usain, you have achieved so much. Here is your stick of celery. And Paul is saying that many of us live our lives, expend our efforts for what at the end of it isn't even worth a stick of celery.

But he says there's a prize that is worth so much more. It's the prize that is worth laying down your life for. It's the prize of having an intimate, close relationship and knowing Christ eternally.

There is nothing that beats it. So how do we make a loss? So how to make a loss just live for anything other than Christ? How to make a profit? Make Christ the center, your goal for everything.

[29 : 45] How to know Christ? We've got to follow the pattern of his life. We've got to be prepared that to know him, we need to follow him to the cross in our lives. What does this mean?

Fourth point, my final point. How do we live the cross and resurrection in our lives? Because if you're like me, when you're going to go into your office, you're probably not waiting for someone to kind of come at you with a machine gun and kill you.

That's not necessarily what suffering looks like. Although in some places in the world, that is what it looks like. But what it looks like in our lives could be many things.

There are sufferings which come just from being in a broken, painful world. And if we cling on to Christ in those things, we can know that resurrection power which enables us to suffer well.

But I don't think Paul is just talking about the things which will happen to us because we're in a broken world. I think he's also talking to us about the choices that we make, where we choose Christ and we risk suffering.

[30 : 52] So one of the key ways that we can learn to live the cross and resurrection is if we begin to take risks for Christ. The reason I know so little of Christ's suffering is because I'm so rarely prepared to take risks for Christ.

So think about it. What risks did you take for Christ in this last week? What risks this coming week are you prepared to take for knowing Christ?

It could be your comfort. If you're shy, it could be that going up to someone who you don't know and just welcoming them could be a risk that you feel just really uncomfortable about.

But that could be a risk that Christ is calling you to make. But I think, for me, one of the biggest risks is that of sharing the gospel with other people.

Because your reputation is really on the line when you do that. You see, for me, I want to show people by my lifestyle that I follow Christ.

[32 : 08] And so I say, I'm going to just live as a good Christian. I don't need to say anything to anyone. And they'll think, they'll automatically by osmosis know that Jesus has died and risen from the dead. And so they will come falling at my feet and say, what must I do to be saved?

But in my experience, that doesn't happen very often. And the thing is, the reason for me why I kind of hide behind this as an excuse is I don't want to risk my reputation.

I don't want to risk people thinking that I'm stupid. I don't want to risk losing my friends because I say Jesus is the most precious thing. But Paul was willing to go to an excrement-ridden prison so he could share the gospel because he believed that knowing Christ was worth risking everything for.

And as you step out and risk, there may be very real rejection, disappointment. But Paul would say, you are a walking display of the gospel. What's the gospel?

The death and resurrection of Christ. When they see your life and see the death and resurrection working out in your life, you're willing to risk everything for him. In China, the church has exploded because people were willing to live the cross and resurrection.

[33 : 42] The early church was willing to even stay in plague-ridden towns to care for the poor because they knew that Christ was so worth it.

And when people saw their lives, they were stunned. How can you live like this? And they pointed to a savior who was so much worth, worth so much more than anything that they needed to cling on to now.

So if you make Christ your goal, don't look at those other things. Be willing to risk for him. You will live a life worth truly with him because you will come to know him more and more.

Let's pray. Maybe just stop for a minute. And I want you to think about that.

What risks have I taken for Christ? What risks might God be calling me to take this week for him that I've been putting off?

[34 : 57] Things I've just been wanting my comfort more than what God is calling me to do. Father, I often don't believe that knowing you is more valuable, more precious than the things around me which attract me so much.

Often so willing to suffer, to get ahead in my career or to get ahead in the eyes of other people, to be respected.

I'm willing to suffer for those things, but I admit that I'm really willing to suffer for you. But I pray that you would become more beautiful in my eyes, in this church's eyes, that we would be a congregation, that when people look at our lives, they would say, Christ must be so precious to you because of what you're willing to give up for him.

Please, would that become a reality in our lives? Amen.