

[OPENING SLIDE]

*"To Live **Is** Christ"*

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

Introduction

[SLIDE # 2] It was a fixture in the home of Pastor Gerhard & Betty Kempff, ever since I first met their daughter Miriam. There is nothing spectacular about it. It's rather plain and ordinary. I recall it being wobbly, until Miriam's brother recently reset and glued it. Now it's sturdier than it's ever been, good for another 40 years, I'd say. *A family's Four-Legged Stool ...* like the pillars of a disciple's life.

Main Point: Life as a disciple is solely God's work, established through His Son, Jesus Christ, and kept intact by the Holy Spirit who "calls, gathers and enlightens us with His gifts." Living in this blessed realization – the 1st leg being living UP in relation to Jesus – a response is sure to come, one that attributes all good things to God, lives solely for Christ, and is forever eager to share the Gospel with others.

[SLIDE # 3]

TO LIVE IS CHRIST IS TO LIVE ... UP.

Amen.

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[SLIDE # 4] Philippians! Paul's "letter of friendship" – the kind of letter a Pastor might write to a congregation with whom he enjoys sweet fellowship in the Gospel. Most likely written from a Roman jail, it acknowledges gifts received, to support him in his ministry. Wherein, Paul is now compelled by the Spirit to write a response of thanks, and to offer words of encouragement to his brothers and sisters in the faith. [Adapted from Schmitt, *CJ*, 43:3, 300]

Thematically, its word used in some form a dozen plus times, it is a letter of "joy"!

[SLIDE # 5] Who couldn't use a little of that? I mean, God knows there's enough in this mean ole' world to rob us of it. But where, even in the face of the odds, the life of a disciple swims about in it – *"counts everything as joy"* (James 1:2) – in a life that stems from the blessed hope that our God readily gives us reason to rejoice!

Yes, the quintessential ingredient in living UP, God **1st** has to come down ... to deliver His gifts – life and salvation in Jesus' name. Long before our word and work goes up, Jesus puts His name on us in Baptism, forgives our sins, pours His Word and works into our lives, and feeds us with His gifts. These –from beginning to end – are the means that make a life lived UP possible.

A life – in the 1st place – of ...

[SLIDE # 6] LIVING VERTICALLY.

1 Paul and Timothy [Paul's "son in the faith," and co-laborer with him], **servants of Christ Jesus** [theirs is an "up" relationship], **to all the saints** [those "called out of darkness into the marvelous light of God's grace"¹ – made and kept holy by means of the Gospel] **in** [spiritual union with] **Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers** [pastors] **and deacons** [those serving the church in some special capacity ... e.g. the care for the poor²]: **2 Grace** [God's undeserved kindness towards unworthy sinners] **to you and peace** [reconciliation, forgiveness³] **from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ** [both source and goal of living UP].

What is the source of a life lived UP? It is a life lived that flows *from*, and returns *to* the Lord. This is who/what a disciple is – to his/her core – one who is "*of... in Christ Jesus*" ... one who has come by way of grace to be His chosen. Where, as God has gone to incredible [vertical] lengths to establish that relationship with us, and now where ours is to do everything we can to foster, renew, and grow that life.

[SLIDE # 7] Like we are doing right now – spending time with Him and one another in this place. Receiving His gifts. Spending time in His Word – be it alone, or in one of our group studies. Spending time in prayer – "faith breathing" ... "*with joy.*"

³ I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine for you all, making my prayer with joy [the keynote of the UP life⁴] ...

⁵ *because of your partnership* [κοινωνία - aka "a fellowship of faith, of love and of

¹ 1 Peter 2:9

² E.g. Stephen & Philip (Acts 6:1-7); "Aware of the dissention and self-serving attitudes of the church, Paul places the leaders *after* the members in a subtle attempt to foster humility."

[Lessing, *CJ*, July 2002, 312] NB: Lessing's remarks could well be used for a sermon on living "in."

³ "The order of the two is significant ... First there must be grace; then peace follows." [Hartwig, *CPR*, 3:4, 20]

⁴ "The keynote of this epistle." (*Sermon Studies on the Epistles (A)*, 321)

service"⁵] ***in the gospel from the first day*** [when Lydia was baptized and immediately welcomed Paul and his companions into her home⁶] *until now.* ⁶ ***And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you*** [the Lord always finishes what He starts] ***will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.***

"God's Word is the well of living water," John Newton, author of "Amazing Grace," once said, "and prayer is the bucket with which to draw it out." Where, to live UP is to cherish both. Yes, both are essential to a disciple's life. Both give birth to our mission and purpose ... *'from the first day until now.'*" Both flow *from*, and return grace, mercy and peace.

Wherein, once we were hopelessly mired in our sins and without help, God changed all that. His grace – that free gift of His undeserved love – covers over our multitude of sins. Now, we have peace – as we revel in our new relationship, freely given and strengthened through the means of grace. [Adapted from Bacon, *CJ*, July 1993, 262] Through God's Word and prayer our lives sing!

What else does a life of UP look like?

[SLIDE # 8] IT LIVES SOLELY FOR JESUS.

Yes, and I will rejoice, ¹⁹ for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ [again, both essential ingredients of living UP] ***this will turn out for my deliverance, ²⁰ as it is my eager expectation and hope*** *that I will not be at all ashamed, but* ***that with full courage, now as always, Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.***

Child of God, for *whom* or *what* do you live? Where, the answer to that question determines *how* you will live? Where, if life is all about seeking and securing comforts for this life, *what* we do and *how* we do it will reflect that.

Take why we work for example – whether you are changing diapers or putting out fires, whether you're caring for the sick, or are now sick. Why do you do what you do – "*whether by life or by death?*"

⁵ *Sermon Studies on the Epistles (A)*, 321; also used in Philippians 1:7, 2:1, 3:10, 4:15

⁶ Acts 16:15

Paul's boldness and confidence encourage us. For w/o the assurance that *what* we do is glorifying to God, we (as w/o love) are nothing but "*clanging gongs or crashing cymbals*." (1 Corinthians 13:1) W/o the pleasure of words/work – up, in *or* out – our lives are as Solomon declares: *meaningless*, empty, irrelevant. (Ecclesiastes 1:2)

[SLIDE # 9]

²¹ ***For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*** ²² [Where even] ***if I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me.*** *Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell.* ²³ *I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart⁷ and be with Christ, for that is far better.* ²⁴ *But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.* ²⁵ ***Convinced of this*** [Paul's pastor side is in full view here], ***I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith,*** ²⁶ ***so that in me you may have ample cause to*** [what?] ***glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.***

Let this be our aim: Christ's love permeating all we do. Where, living UP in Him and in His grace fuels and inspires glorifying Him, blessing and serving others, providing for our own needs, as well as being a blessing to this congregation!

Leading us to one further aspect of what living up looks like, where we ...

[SLIDE # 10] SEEK TO IMPART LIFE TO OTHERS.

²⁷ ***Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ*** [living UP it will be no other way], ***so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.***

[SLIDE # 11] Computer scientist Masanobu Taniguchi once remarked, "When you give life to others, you'll also be given life." That is, as others are blessed, so are we. Where, "as a congregation gathered around Word and Sacrament, our partnership abounds with joy as together we spread the Gospel. For some that partnership involves financial support, where for others it's being involved in the work of the parish as teachers and officers, and for still others, perhaps a quiet, helping service. Yet, "in all aspects our partnership is in Christ." [Bacon, 263]

⁷ "In relation to Paul's profession as a tentmaker, the term *depart* means to strike, or take down, the tent to be ready to travel elsewhere. Paul saw death not as the end of life but as a time of moving from one home to another." (NSB, 1999)

When we live from our UP, our living in and out is inspired, expressive, profound!

So, what does this living UP look like in real time?

Δ [SLIDE # 12] **Avail yourself continually of the means of grace** ... the Holy Spirit's way of establishing and keeping that vertical relationship intact.

As He fills us, we return our worship. Study His Word. Live a life of prayer. Regularly attend the services of God's house. Receive His gifts of forgiveness and grace as you mutually encourage your brothers and sisters in the faith.

Δ [SLIDE # 13] Like the Philippians, **be ready for what God may ask** of you and me – partners together in this Gospel ministry.

As you partner with me – and I with you – through prayer, hospitality, and financial gifts, we become partners together in spreading the Gospel. Let's keep our options open, following the direction of the Holy Spirit, praying for willingness, discernment and courage ... to follow where He leads ... all the while trusting that as He began this work and ministry in us, He *will* complete it!

Δ [SLIDE # 14] **Regularly revisit this sentence: "For me, to live is ____."**

Given your priorities this week, in the next year, three, or five, how would you fill in the blank? What would change if you, like Paul, wrote/rewrote "Christ"? Wherein, living UP gives birth to our living in and out as we share our food ... work for mercy ... live generously ... all so that others will come to know that the gospel is true. (Adapted from *LASB*, 2016)

Conclusion

Leg 1 of a *Four-Legged Stool*. Where, as ordinary as this stool may be, there is certainly nothing ordinary about your living UP, especially when we live that way together – to the full (John 10:10b). Where, living IN [leg 2] and OUT [leg 3], and using our time, talent and treasure to serve this ministry [leg 4], all flows from this most important first leg!

[SLIDE # 15]

TO LIVE IS CHRIST IS TO LIVE ... UP.

Amen.

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[Friday E-mail:] "'Theologies of glory,' says *Christian Post* columnist Tullian Tchividjian, "are approaches to Christianity (and to life) that try ... to minimize difficult and painful things, or to move past them rather than looking them square in the face and accepting them. Theologies of glory acknowledge the cross, but view it primarily as a means to an end—an unpleasant but necessary step on the way to personal improvement, the transformation of human potential." In other words, a theology of glory seeks to avoid suffering, minimizing God's ability to accomplish His will through instruments – like the Cross.

Which leads Paul in this Sunday's Epistle reading from Philippians 1 to restate who he is and what God has called him to do. Wherein, Paul's being in prison is a *good* thing ... producing a letter that has stood as a powerful means for God to reach the Church for the sake of Gospel. "*With full courage,*" Paul writes, so that "*now, as always, Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.*" It is this quintessential belief that enables the followers of Christ to live up, in and out.

Which is the subject of a four-week sermon series I'm working on. Using Paul's letter to the Philippians as a backdrop, we will look at the life of a disciple of Christ from the perspective of a four-legged stool, this week – living up. Where, to be sure, all of our lives stem from this – first, in God's vertical descent to us in grace, but then, living vertically out of the deep pool of His kindness, we take necessary time to keep our tanks full – as it were – by swimming about in that grace ... by swimming about in God's Word, by bathing often in prayer, of staying in constant contact with our Lord in the ways He has provided for us to do so – and so to live!

It is these means that governed Paul's entire life as a Christian. V. 21: "*For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain,*" Paul says, continuing on by saying, "*I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus.*"

Child of God, I invite you to walk with me through this life-altering letter. Rejoice with me in this 4-week opportunity to be strengthened in faith – in what it means not only to be a child of God, but to be a member of this congregation. "To live is Christ ... is to live!" Truly live, as each and every one of us are saved by, and now stand in the shadow of, the Cross. Where, after this series it is my hope that what is communicated is what Dostoyevsky paraphrased in his book *The Brothers Karamazov*. "You will burn and you will burn out; you will be healed and come back again." SYOS!