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What Is My Life?

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"What Is My Life?"



Last Sermon by the

REV. WILLIAM CUTTER CONDIT, D. D.

Delivered in First Presbyterian Church

ASHLAND, KENTUCKY

Sunday, August 29, 1926

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REV. W. C. CONDIT, D. D.

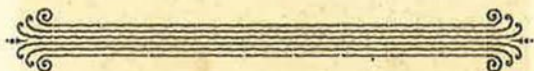
Born Feb. 2, 1841 — Died Oct. 7, 1926

Pastor First Presbyterian Church, Ashland, Ky.

June, 1866 to June 1921

Pastor Emeritus

June 1921 to Oct. 7, 1926



“What Is My Life?”

Text: Philippians 1:21

“For Me To Live Is Christ.”

About a month ago I picked up a magazine and opening to the first page, I read the question, “What is my life?” It started me to thinking and I said to myself, there is a subject and if I get an opportunity to preach, I will use it. So today I have this chance.

You will listen to an old man, whose days are almost numbered, as he presents this subject. It may be the last time you will hear me for I feel now that I am doing things for the last time. I have taken for my text the words of Paul in his letter to the Philippians, first chapter, twenty-first verse: “For me to live is Christ.” These are solemn words and they take hold upon us with peculiar force at this season of the year. This is the time of endings

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and beginnings. Vacation is over. We are now settled down to our daily tasks, some of you to the study of your books, others to the different things in life's work, everyday tasks, whatever they are. It is a good time, therefore, to take stock of our moral and spiritual equipment. What does it all mean that I am a living man? What is it all for? What is my life anyhow? Life is a strange, varied experience. We find ourselves here, living along day after day, until our time is spent. What does it all mean? What is the good of it?

Mark Twain, in his autobiography, tells how his little daughter, Susy, one day asked her mother with painful earnestness: "Mother, what is 'it all for? People are born to live and marry and work and die; and then more people are born and live and die. What is it all for?" That question kept hounding the great humorist all his life long.

Now, it is a good thing for each of us to make the question very personal. What is my life? What is it for? Here I am,

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getting up every morning, going about my work, my duties, my pleasures, meeting people coming home, sleeping and getting up again. What is it all for?

When one begins to emerge from the lovely but limited valley of childhood, there are two mountain peaks that appear against the sky, if the heart is pure and the vision clear. To scale summits becomes the passion of life. One of these peaks is the task, the achievement of brain or hand of which youth dreams, the work to be done. It is a sacred moment when that summit is first seen in the distance and the soul girds itself to climb. The other peak is the life, the achievement of the heart, the snow white summit of character that is what one is to be. Vital as the task may be, this other summit is supreme. If one's footsteps are never found in its crystal snows, then life is a failure, no matter what other summits are scaled.

If you will look at it closely, you will see the summits are one at their base, that one is but the foothill of the other. The

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task exists for the life, never the life for the task. The work of life is a means, there is but one end, Life.

No achievement of any life, however conspicuous and perfect, means anything when it stands alone. Its value and vindication are found only in its contributions to life. Works vanish, workers are eternal. Not a living, but a life is the end of creation.

Paul, in the brief sentence I have taken as my text, expressed what his life is to him: "For me to live is Christ." His sole end in living was to glorify Christ. Christ was the supreme object of his existence and he valued it only as being devoted to Christ's honor. Paul's aim was not learning, nor gold, nor honor, nor pleasure. It was to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ, a purpose to which he devoted himself with as much singleness and ardour as ever did misers to the pursuit of gold or devotees of pleasure to amusements or aspirants for fame to ambition.

In Wales and in Scotland in the mining

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districts, “winning the coal or the mineral” is a common expression, by which they mean, sinking a shaft deep down to get out the ore in richer abundance. Let us take the idea. Paul, on the day when he first discovered Christ, found himself the possessor of a large estate. He was standing, so to speak, at the entrance of his mine and he saw some of his precious ore. He could not take his eyes off of what he did see, but the more he looked, the more he discovered of the inexhaustible riches there. He had only to dig down, to sink his shaft in all directions and there was no end to what he might bring up out of his mine; and so it was his life time wish “That I may win Christ.”

Be sure, my hearer, your life means what you make it mean. God gives you life but leaves you to decide that greatest of all questions, what that life shall be. Your own soul decides what you are. I know some talk and preach about heredity and environment and their influence, but do not be deceived by this. Nothing out-

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side of yourself, but your own soul decides the question. Our whole organized life is built on the conviction that man is responsible for what he is and does. The best known, surest fact in the world is the fact of our moral responsibility for what we do and are.

So then, can I persuade you to sit down now and make yourself face yourself and ask what is life? What is it to me to live?

Suppose, as someone suggests, we go back to those early times when it was easy to see the unseen as Moses and Joshua and David and Solomon and those of that age saw them, and you, sitting in your room, should see a great angel come in and stand before you and tell you that God had sent him to judge you and then he should present you a slip, as it were an examination paper, on which were the words: “To me, to live is,” then a blank to be filled in by you with the correct word. Now, what would you write? This is no fancy idea. It may not be an angel, but call it conscience, call it God, call it what you will,

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there is that which summons you to judgment, and demands that you fill out the blank. To me life is—honest?

Some would write: work or business. To me to live is business. Well, that is good. But is that enough to make life happy? To make it what God intended it to be? Recall Christ's word, when he tells of a prosperous man who was impressed with his success and said, "I will tear down my barns and build greater where I may store my goods," and the Spirit said: "This night thy soul is required of thee then whose shall these things be? What shall it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

Watch the men who live in that way, getting day by day more into the clutches of daily toil, narrowing their interest down more and more to things that make for success in business. Watch such men when powers fail, the body weakens, the machinery wears out and they have to give up work. What is life now? They have succeeded, they have made money, but as has

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been pungently said, "While they have a fortune to retire on, they have nothing to retire to." What a significant question is that common query at the end of a man's life. "How much did he leave?" It is a terrible thing to live, so that at last he must leave all that meant life to him.

But there are some, if they would be honest, would be compelled to fill out the blank with fun and pleasure. But that is not sufficient. The one who fills that blank with pleasure is writing down his own life a failure. Failure as it is to define life in terms of drudgery, it is as bad or worse to define it in terms of self-indulgence. Pleasure is purest and most satisfying, when it comes to us as the gracious accompaniment to a really worthy and noble end and motive for living.

Again there is fame that presents itself as a goal. But there are two questions to ask about fame. Will it satisfy one longer than anything else? Is it a choice which I can never possibly regret? These two questions are easily answered. I have

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never known a man who had achieved fame who did not feel in his latter years that the game was not worth the candle, that he had paid too dearly for his whistle. And, I have never known a man who had struggled for fame who did not regret, at some time, that he had not chosen another sphere of life.

But, suppose I choose social position. will it satisfy me longer than anything else? Is the pursuit of a high place in society a choice which I can never possibly regret? It all looks very beautiful at a distance, but who that has risen to that exclusive circle that soars far above the heads of ordinary people, has not grown weary of its demands, weary of its shallowness, weary of its heartlessness and has longed for some obscure, quiet spot where he could dwell under his own vine and fig tree with none to molest or make him afraid.

There are a dozen other things which one might choose. Not one that will continue to satisfy; not the choice of which

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we will not eventually regret, if we choose it as the chief thing. Among all the treasures spread out before mortal man there is but one that will satisfy him forever, one, the choice of which as the chief thing, he can never regret.

If I choose Christ as my Saviour and Lord; if I open my heart to him; if I enthroned Him in my heart as my King; if I allow myself to be dominated by Him, I shall be satisfied forever. It matters not what may happen, the Spirit filled life is the one continually satisfying thing and since the beginning of time, no man who has made this choice has ever been known to regret it.

Nothing brighter or nobler can come to a life than to be able to say with Paul in utter reality, "For me to live is Christ." Mark how the great Apostle gathers all his energies together in concentrated and undivided purpose. His religious ambition shall be supreme and in the fierceness of his desire he will draw every minor yearning to the central purpose like tributaries

converging upon the main stream of a glorious river.

As Dr. Jowett remarks, "It is this concentration which enfolds the secret of the progressive lives of all the saints of God. They are for one thing and one thing only." So many of us make our religion one of many interests. We take it up for a time and then we put it down again. We are religious by spasms. We are devotional by turns.

We assume there is time for everything and we often make the heavenly visitor tarry in the hall or even at the door until we have disposed of more urgent business.

Now, to the Apostle Paul, the urgent business in all business was just that of religion itself. Life to Paul was one vast temple and market was just a part of the temple and so was his trade and so were his friendships and the one spirit must possess and pervade them all. The deepest thing in him and the all-controlling thing was his religion. With some men religion is a thing apart; with Paul it was his

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whole existence. Some men are religious only on great festal days of the church. Others are religious only in the emergencies of life—the hours of physical danger or serious illness or approaching death. Paul lived in the atmosphere of religion every hour of the day.

In every possible phase of the word life, Christ is the life of the Christian. To live is Christ, for he is the mystical source from whom all our life flows. “With thee is the Fountain of life,” and all life both of body and spirit is from Him, by Him and in Him.

To live is Christ, for He is the aim and object, as well as the object of it all and no other is worth calling life but that which for Him, by willing consecration as well as from Him by constant derivation.

To live is Christ, for He is the model of all our life and the one all sufficient law is to be as Christ, for Christ, by, in and from Christ. So shall there be strength, peace and freedom in our day. The unity brought into life thereby will issue in calm

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blessedness, contrasted wonderfully with the divided hearts and aims which fritter our days into fragments and make our lives heaps of broken links instead of chains.

Life's evening, we may rest assured, will take its character from the day which hath preceded it and if we would choose our career in the comfort of religious hope, we must prepare for it by early and continued religious habit.

The eternal life hangs on the small thread of the present. As we are now, so shall we be forever. Eternal life is a synonym for character. The child, it is said, is the father of the man. This has a more solemn and awful, and a more significant and truthful meaning with regard to the world to come. The childhood of time will determine the manhood of eternity. The passing moments of the present will color the infinite future. Life in this world is the cartoon, the dim shadowy outline which will be filled up and embodied in the life hereafter. What then is your life?

Are you investing any real and consider-

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able part of your life in the things that last? Are you laying up a foundation for life to come? What are you living in? Every day the grooves are being set and deepened along the way which this life of yours is to run. What will you say when called to fill in that blank space—To me to live is—WHAT?