

Living IS Christ

Philippians 1:21-24 HCSB For me, living is Christ and dying is gain. (22) Now if I live on in the flesh, this means fruitful work for me; and I don't know which one I should choose. (23) I am pressured by both. I have the desire to depart and be with Christ--which is far better-- (24) but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you.

Living is Christ. Jesus is the source of our hope for a life beyond this one. He is the reason that anything we do in this life has any meaning. Solomon, the wisest human ever, dedicated a large portion of his life trying to determine if there was any point to anything outside of God. His conclusion was "hevel hevelim", "futility of futilities". Then he went on,

- **Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 HCSB** When all has been heard, the conclusion of the matter is: fear God and keep His commands, because this *is for* all humanity. (14) For God will bring every act to judgment, including every hidden thing, whether good or evil.

To consider one's life Christ's, to consider life to BE Christ, is to have one's eyes firmly on the only thing that is eternal. It is to follow in the footsteps of our father Abraham.

- **Hebrews 11:8-10 HCSB** By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed and went out to a place he was going to receive as an inheritance; he went out, not knowing where he was going. (9) By faith he stayed as a foreigner in the land of promise, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, co-heirs of the same promise. (10) For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

It is to follow in the footsteps of the prophet Moses.

- **Hebrews 11:24-27 HCSB** By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter (25) and chose to suffer with the people of God rather than to enjoy the short-lived pleasure of sin. (26) For he considered reproach for the sake of the Messiah to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, since his attention was on the reward. (27) By faith he left Egypt behind, not being afraid of the king's anger, for he persevered, as one who sees Him who is invisible.

It is what it truly means to be Jewish.

Dying is gain. What is the gain? Verse 23 points it out: it is to be with Christ, which is far better. Jesus is the treasure that is more valuable than all else we possess combined.

- **Matthew 13:44 HCSB** "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure, buried in a field, that a man found and reburied. Then in his joy he goes and sells everything he has and buys that field.

Then look at,

- **Matthew 13:45-46 HCSB** "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. (46) When he found one priceless pearl, he went and sold everything he had, and bought it.

Jesus is the pearl of great price for which we are willing to set aside all else in order to gain. Talmidim know that even one's life, if lost for the Master, is not truly lost but actually permanently gained.

- **Matthew 10:39 HCSB** Anyone finding his life will lose it, and anyone losing his life because of Me will find it.

- **Matthew 16:25-28 HCSB** For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of Me will find it. (26) What will it benefit a man if he gains the whole world yet loses his life? Or what will a man give in exchange for his life? (27) For the Son of Man is going to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will reward each according to what he has done. (28) I assure you: There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

Notice that Jesus said some would not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom? Everyone who heard that message died physically. Some were disciples. Some, like Judas, were traitors. We will not really find out who dies and who lives until Jesus returns. That is when the real life begins for us. All this here is just the lobby, the vestibule, the foyer, the waiting room. Up ahead lies the Kingdom in all its glory and the Son of Man returning with legions of holy angels. Let us take a look at our dim, dingy lives, consider the waiting glories, and decide whether or not dying is gain.

Depart and be with Christ. For the believer, to die is to be with Christ. Death is not a mindless, unconscious sleep. Death is not oblivion. Even the death of the brain, the hardware on which the software of our soul runs, does not result in the death of our spirits. The human spirit, that part of us which experiences d'vekut with God, is eternal. The question is not whether the spirit dies, but where does the spirit continue to exist? For the tzaddikim – that would be heaven.

- **2 Corinthians 5:8 HCSB** yet we are confident and satisfied to be out of the body and at home with the Lord.

Which is far better. This must mean that when we die we are yet conscious and aware of our improved state for,

- **Ecclesiastes 9:4 HCSB** But there is hope for whoever is joined with all the living, since a live dog is better than a dead lion.

Necessary for you. Paul was a good apostle and the one who, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote:

- **Romans 12:3 HCSB** For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one.
- **Philippians 2:3-4 HCSB** Do nothing out of rivalry or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. (4) Everyone should look out not *only* for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

So, he considered the personal advantages of death or the next world (olam habah) and the responsibilities that called him to remain in this world or life (olam hazeh) and allowed his people's needs dictate the call. He put their needs before his own, as must all good shepherds.

Philippians 1:22-24 HCSB Now if I live on in the flesh, this means fruitful work for me; and I don't know which one I should choose. (23) I am pressured by both. I have the desire to depart and be with Christ--which is far better-- (24) but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you.

I live on in the flesh. Note Paul's distinction between the body and the "I". "I" will continue on, whether in this body or not. My body may be beaten but "I" remain untouched. My body may be killed, but "I" will continue to live. One day "I" will receive a new, glorified body and "I" will be vindicated by my Master. One day all will bow the knee and declare Jesus to be Lord - even Satan the Accuser. But when I look up I will see a smiling, loving face bidding me welcome into His presence. Those who persecute God's people will look up and only see the door to the Lake of Fire slowly swinging wide.

The spirit of the rashaim will temporarily reside in Gehenna.

- **Luke 16:22-24 HCSB** One day the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. (23) And being in torment in Hades, he looked up and saw Abraham a long way off, with Lazarus at his side. (24) 'Father Abraham!' he called out, 'Have mercy on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this flame!'

At some point in the future, Gehenna will be emptied, and all its citizens will be brought before the Great White Throne of Judgment (Revelation 20:11-13).

- **Revelation 20:11-13 HCSB** Then I saw a great white throne and One seated on it. Earth and heaven fled from His presence, and no place was found for them. (12) I also saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life, and the dead were judged according to their works by what was written in the books. (13) Then the sea gave up its dead, and Death and Hades gave up their dead; all were judged according to their works.

There the Sefer ha Ch'aim, the Book of Life, will be opened. When their name is found to have been blotted out, other books will be opened. Their salvation will be determined by their good works and every one of them will fall short, for anyone not found written in the Book of Life will be thrown into the Lake of Fire.

- **Revelation 20:14-15 HCSB** Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. (15) And anyone not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

Fruitful work. For Paul, this was specifically the spread of the Gospel, the establishment of Gentile churches and ongoing discipleship. For us, the fruitful work may be different for all are gifted differently.

- **Romans 12:6 HCSB** According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts...

But no matter how we are gifted and no matter where or how we are called to labor, we are all required to be fruitful.

- **John 15:5-8 HCSB** "I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in Me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without Me. (6) If anyone does not remain in Me, he is thrown aside like a branch and he withers. They gather them, throw them into the fire, and they are burned. (7) If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you want and it will be done for you. (8) My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be My disciples.

We need to keep in mind, "Much will be required of everyone who has been given much. And even more will be expected of the one who has been entrusted with more." (Luke 12:48)

What do you think is expected of those who have received the gift of forgiveness of sins, power to overcome sin, eternal life in glory, and the Holy Spirit?