



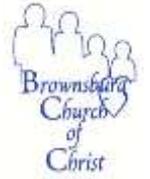
Clinging to Life

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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AM Assembly



Introduction:

November 7, 1999—I was sitting in the hospital room with Marita the day after Ethan was born. The phone rang and I answered it. However, it was not someone calling to congratulate us on our son. Rather, I was told my dad was in the hospital in Jonesboro, AR, and had been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. We were told 5% live for 2 years. 2% live for 5. The rest die within the first year. But my dad was not going to take it lying down. He took the bull by the horns and decided to beat it. He was going to cling to life as long as possible. He listened to his doctors and also started taking many more natural precautions—juicing, supplements, exercise, etc.

I can hardly imagine what it is like to have a doctor hand you a death sentence; and I have no idea how I will face it if I'm ever given one. I hope I will face it as Paul did. Paul faced a similar situation in **Philippians 1:19-26**. He was a prisoner and might be executed, but he was convinced he would be delivered. He clung to life. I've often seen Christians diagnosed with death cling to life as if it is the worst possible thing that could happen. They cling to life because of fear, regret, or merely preference. But that was not why Paul clung to life. Examine with me why Paul clung to life and let it change the way you face life and death.

Discussion:

- I. Paul clung to life, but not for personal gain.
 - A. In **Philippians 1:21**, Paul said, "...to die is gain" (ESV). Paul did not view clinging to life as personal gain. He did not want to cling to life because he thought he was going to miss out on something. He was not thinking about places he wanted to see or people he wanted to meet. He wasn't thinking about money he wanted to make or entertainments he wanted to enjoy. He wasn't worried about losing his savings, his house or even his family. He wasn't afraid of death. He didn't look at death as the great mystery hereafter. Therefore, he did not cling to life because of personal gain.
 - B. To Paul, death would bring personal gain. He knew if he departed, he would get to be with Christ (**Philippians 1:23**). He knew an inheritance awaited him in heaven reserved by the power of God through faith (**I Peter 1:3-5**). He recognized the glory that would be revealed in him after he had died would make everything he had faced in life worth it (**Romans 8:18**). Continuing life meant continuing temptation, continuing hardship, continuing persecution. Death meant peace and comfort for the faithful (cf. **Luke 16:22**).
 - C. We must be honest with ourselves. When we cling to life, is it for personal gain or because of personal fears brought on by weak faith? We must look to Paul as our example and never cling to life for personal gain. We must recognize if continuing in this world is more gain to us than going to the next, we have some problems.
- II. Paul clung to life to further the cause of Christ.
 - A. In **Philippians 1:21**, Paul said, "...to live is Christ" (ESV). Paul did not want to live for his personal gain. He wanted to live for Christ's gain. Once he was dead, he could no longer impact the world for Christ's sake.
 - B. We see this same principle demonstrated in the psalms. Notice how often the psalmists ask God to deliver them from the grave. Each time they tie it back to God receiving praise and how when they are dead they will no longer be able to do that.
 1. In **Psalms 6:4-5**, David asks for deliverance because there will be no remembrance of God in the grave.
 2. In **Psalms 30:8-9**, David asked what benefit would come to God from his death. The dust won't praise God. But if he lives, he will.
 3. In **Psalms 88:9-12**, Heman asked for deliverance because the dead cannot rise up to praise God or declare His steadfast love.
 - C. When we cling to life, is it because of our gain or Christ's? Paul, David, Heman were all more concerned about the impact their death would have on God's plan. Not that they viewed themselves as indispensable to God, but they wanted to be part of God's plan. They wanted others to know about their great God. They wanted to get the message of praise and love out but would no longer be able to if they were dead. If we cling to life, it must be for Christ's gain, not our own.

III. Paul clung to life to serve others.

- A. **Philippians 1:24-25** says Paul wanted to cling to life in order to serve others. Staying in this life would not benefit Paul, but it would benefit those he could edify. Once he was dead, he could no longer be of any benefit to any of his brethren or to any of the lost in the world.
- B. This connects with what Paul said in **Philippians 2:3-4**, that we are to view others as more important than ourselves and to seek their needs above our own. As Paul said in **Romans 15:1-2**, everything we do is bear with others and build them up instead of pleasing ourselves. In **I Peter 4:10**, Peter said we are to use our gifts in order to serve one another.
- C. Is this why we cling to life? So we can serve and edify others? Are we more concerned with our own personal gain or more concerned about what we can do for others? If we cling to life, it must not be for our personal gain but in order to be a help to others.

IV. Live like you are dying.

- A. Several years ago, Tim McGraw released a hit song entitled, "Live Like You Were Dying." The song highlighted how one man learning he was dying began to live like he was supposed to all along. There is a similar spiritual point. Many people when they learn they may die open their eyes to eternity and turn their lives around. Sadly, however, these kinds of turnarounds are often short lived. Too often the turnaround was a bartering technique to manipulate God to extend their life saying, "God, if only you will get me out of this, I will start serving you better." Sometimes they do come out of the sickness, the shock of the death sentence wears off, and they just slip back into old ways.
- B. We need to understand the key to clinging to life. Paul did not receive a death sentence and then start being concerned about Christ's gain and helping others. That was how he lived his life all along. Few of us have a death sentence hanging over us. Few of us are clinging to life. We are just living it. But what are we doing with our lives? Are we gain for Christ? Are we help to others? If we are not now, what makes us think we will suddenly change when we learn we are dying? Further, if we only change because we are desperately clinging to this life, we will have really missed the point. This is a great paradox. The fact is, when we live and then cling to life for the proper reasons, we really won't be upset if God takes us out of this life. After all, death is gain for us who have lived for Christ and others.
- C. Thus, the real question of this lesson is not why will you cling to life one day when it is your turn to die; the real question is how are you living right now?

Conclusion:

"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord" (**Revelation 14:13**—ESV). Death is a blessing for God's children. Now don't misunderstand me. I'm not suggesting we should all be looking for our ticket out of this life. I'm merely pointing out that when we have the proper faith we won't cling to this life desperately as if death is the worst thing in the world. Further, while we are living in this life or clinging to this life, we will do so for Christ's gain and to help others. Again, we ask our question; how are we living?