

Park Road Baptist Church 8th August 2021

Call to worship

From Psalm 34 (The Message)

I bless God every chance I get;

My lungs expand with his praise.

Look at him; give him your warmest smile.

Never hide your feelings from him.

Open your mouth and taste, open your eyes and see—

How good God is.

Blessed are you who run to him.

Worship God if you want the best;

Worship opens doors to all his goodness.

Song Here for you (Chris Tomlin)

Song Jesus, lover of my Soul 'It's all about You' (Paul Oakley)

Song Worthy, O worthy are you Lord (Mark Kinzer)

Bible Reading: Philippians 1:20 – 30 (Read by Hazel Leonard)

Prayer

Song Dear Lord and Father of mankind (John Greenleaf Whittier)

Sermon

A reason to live

I wonder if any of you have seen the movie, 'Saving Private Ryan', starring Tom Hanks. I'm sure many of you have. (1)

You have mum and dad and their four sons. The father dies and then the four sons get called up to the Second World War. They leave mum at home on her own and they go out to fight in the war. Then word gets back to their mum that three of her four children have been killed.

So, she has lost her husband and three of her sons and all she has left is this one son, Private Ryan. (2) And so, the wheels are set in motion to try and find this young soldier, Private Ryan.

And of course, it's Captain John Miller played by Tom Hanks who gathers a little group together and they go through France looking for Private Ryan. (3) They literally fight their way through all kinds of dark and bleak and dangerous conditions until they eventually find him.

But here's the thing – Private Ryan refuses to leave his unit until reinforcements arrive. He won't abandon his friends.

And they are in this village that has been decimated by bombs and it's just a shell and in the distance, you hear the rumbling of German tanks. It's just such an eerie sound as you can hear them getting closer and closer.

What unfolds is a ferocious battle. Captain John Miller and his colleagues come out victorious but there is great loss of life – most of his men are killed or badly wounded.

And in the next scene we see Captain John Miller sitting on the ground, propped up against a vehicle and dying of the wounds he sustained while trying to protect Private Ryan.

And with his last breath he pulls Private Ryan closer, and he whispers 2 words 'earn this.'

(4) Show video clip <https://youtu.be/oCsW70annps>

What he is saying is that many brave men gave their lives for your life so live your life in such a way that you deserve their sacrifice. Don't waste your life Private Ryan, because you wouldn't even have a life if they hadn't sacrificed their lives for you.

(5) And then almost right at the end of the film – we are transported some 50 years into the future when Private Ryan is this old man with his family, and they are walking through this graveyard in France and it's just full of white crosses. It's a really moving scene and in that sea of crosses, he finds the one that means the most to him, Captain John Miller who gave his life for him. And he is just so consumed with passion and thankfulness that one man should come to look for him and save him and to give him a life to live.

In all his letters, Paul continually takes us back to the cross, to the one who came to look for us and to save us and to give us a life to live – and that is so true of this letter we call Philippians.

(6) And I can see Paul in that Roman prison falling on his knees, filled with gratitude as he says these words that I don't want to wander far from this morning (Philippians 1 verse 21) – **FOR TO ME TO LIVE IS CHRIST, TO DIE IS GAIN.**

If you wanted to memorise a verse from Philippians this would be a good one to choose.

What makes people successful? Why is it that some people are successful while others are not?

There are many answers given to that but according to secular studies, the one common factor seems to be that all successful people have a very clear purpose in life.

In other words, they have a compelling reason to get out of bed in the morning. They will get up no matter how they are feeling because they have a reason to live.

Just think of all the athletes competing at the Olympic Games. For the last 4 years their sole purpose in life has been to make it to the Olympics. They put themselves through a very detailed and rigorous training programme and adhere to a very strict diet.

If it's true that having a purpose in life helps you to be successful, then the apostle Paul was one of the most successful people who ever lived because he had a purpose that was so clear and so definite and so profound.

It permeated everything he said and did, and it gave him hope during the darkest moments of his life.

So, what was his purpose in life?

You could condense Paul's whole life down to this one sentence – ***'For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.'***

His whole life could be summarised in those 12 words.

I wonder how you would complete that sentence if you only had the first part of it? If you were being really honest with yourself, how would you complete it?

(7) For to me to live is

How would you fill in the blank?

How would someone else fill in the blank for you?

The truth is that no-one leaves that sentence blank because we all live for something or someone.

If you were to put in 'money' then to die is not gain but loss because you leave it all behind.

If you put for to me to live is fame or recognition, then to die is just to be forgotten.

If you put for to me to live is possessions and gathering as much as I can to make my life as comfortable as possible – then to die is to lose all that.

Listen again to Paul, ***'For to me to live is Christ'***, and it's only when we say that, can we also say, ***'and to die is gain.'***

In some ways it seems as if Paul is torn between the two. Paul loves life. He loves writing letters and telling people about Jesus and he has an amazing joy on the inside, but Paul knows that to die is going to be even better.

And so, he is being pulled in different directions.

(8) Can anyone remember the Stretch Armstrong figures, which you might have got in your Christmas stocking some years ago?

Paul is a bit like that. He is being stretched one way (LIFE) and then the other way (TO BE WITH JESUS).

I can't think of a better goal in life than to be in the presence of the Lord Jesus. That will be the greatest joy and the greatest satisfaction. Like Paul, we should be saying, **'I can't wait for that day.'**

I thought I would finish with a story that some of you will know well. We are going back to the year 1955.

(9) Jim Elliot and four of his friends, all under the age of 35 gathered in Ecuador with a vision of bringing the gospel to a tribe of Indians called the Aucas, which actually means **'savage'**. And that name was given to them by the other tribes. The Aucas lived deep in the jungle, and they had never heard about Jesus, and they had virtually no contact with the outside world.

These missionaries were highly trained and deeply committed to the Lord and they started to pray about how they could bring the message of Jesus to them. As they flew over an Auca village they had the idea of lowering down gifts on a big pot tied to a long rope. They did that a number of times and eventually the Indians would put gifts into that same pot, and they would pull them up.

Then in January 1956 the five missionaries decided the time had come for us to be among them and to make personal contact.

And so, after much prayer they established a base camp on a sandy beach on the Curaray River. And then on January 8th 1956, these five missionaries were speared to death by the people they tried to reach.

The news of this shocked the world and it seemed such a waste of their lives.

(10) But 2 years later when they discovered Jim Elliot's journal it had this now well-known quote, **'he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.'**

That fits so well with what Paul was saying.

You are not a fool to give what you cannot keep, to gain what you cannot lose. So, was it worth it? Was it worth it that these 5 young men should have their lives taken at such a young age and in such a cruel way?

Well, within a few years, missionary colleges began to spring up and there was an unprecedented number of missionaries who went out with the gospel to reach tribes that had never been reached before.

And this is the bit of the story that I find so moving. Nine years after those five missionaries had been martyred, two of the Auca Indians who had killed them came to faith in Jesus Christ and a church was established.

And those two Aucas who became Christians went on to baptise the children of those missionaries they had killed – and it took place in that same river, at that same spot where blood had been shed.

Can you imagine how powerful that must have been?

And now a flourishing church has been established among the Auca Indians.

How true it is that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.

These men had no idea of the thousands of lives they would touch.

If we could speak to those 5 men today and ask them, was it worth it? I think we know their answer.

Yes, a thousand times, yes.

And that's the same answer that Paul would give.

'For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.'

Song – All I once held dear (Graham Kendrick)