What will people say at your funeral? That question helped one man redirect the focus of his entire life. Alfred Nobel invented dynamite in 1866 and it made him extremely rich. A little over 20 years later, a French newspaper mistakenly published Nobel’s obituary while he was still alive. The obituary condemned Nobel’s invention of dynamite and referred to him as “the merchant of death.” The obituary read, “Dr. Alfred Nobel, who became rich by finding ways to kill more people faster than ever before, died yesterday.”

Now, contrary to the obituary’s implication, Nobel was actually very interested in peace-related issues, and he was extremely upset to think that people would remember him as “the merchant of death.” So upon reading that premature obituary, Nobel decided that he would do everything he could to change his legacy. About 8 years later, Nobel died, and people were stunned when his will was read. Nobel willed that his fortune be used to establish prizes for extraordinary achievements in physics, chemistry, medicine, literature, and peace… which we now know as the Nobel Prizes. Since Nobel’s death, a total of 543 Nobel Prizes have been awarded, and the Nobel Prize is generally considered the most prestigious honor a person can receive.

People’s thoughts about Alfred Nobel are very different today than they were when that original obituary condemned him as the merchant of death. Obviously, Nobel benefited from reading his premature obituary. Most of us probably won’t have that experience. We won’t read our obituaries before we die. But it’s still very worthwhile for us to think about the legacy that we’ll leave behind. When people remember you, what will they remember most? What will they say your life was about? What will they say you lived for? The only way to correctly answer that question is to say, “It depends.” It depends on how you live your life. And it depends on what you live your life for.

And in our text today, the Apostle Paul is focused on that very issue. He’s focused on how you should live your life and what you should live your life for. We’re studying Philippians 1:20-26 today. And there’s really no way to overstate just how powerful and just how life-changing this text is. So turn with me to Philippians 1:20-26. And before we read these verses, let me remind you of what’s going on in Paul’s life as he writes these words. Paul’s a prisoner in Rome, awaiting trial before Caesar. He has no idea when that trial will come. They’ve already held him prisoner for four years. And for all he knows, his trial may never come. And even if it finally does come, he has no idea how it will turn out. They may set him free. They may send him back to jail. Or they may kill him. He wouldn’t be the first Christian to be killed in the Roman Empire for his faith in Jesus, and he certainly won’t be the last. So the situation that Paul finds himself in is literally one of life and death. And it’s with that in mind that he writes Philippians 1:20-26. So let’s read those verses. Paul writes, *“I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.”*

There is so much to see in these verses… so much power… so much passion… so much truth. And it’s all packed into verse 20, and then it just explodes through the rest of the text. Verse 20 is the big idea. The rest of the text explains that big idea. So let’s look at verse 20 again, *“I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.”*

The very first thing we need to do is we need to make sure we see what this verse is really about. And it may not be what you think it’s about at first glance. Paul doesn’t know whether he’s going to live or die, and he starts by saying, *“I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed.”* In other words, “Whether I live or die, I don’t want to be ashamed. I don’t want to be ashamed of my life. And I don’t want to be ashamed of my death.”

And there’s a really important question I want us to think about right here. If Paul doesn’t want to be put to shame, then what does he want? What’s the opposite of being put to shame? Most people would say that the opposite of being put to shame is receiving honor. So if we follow that line of thinking, then we would assume Paul’s saying, “Whether I live or die, I hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but instead, that I will receive honor.”

But that’s not what Paul says. He doesn’t say, “I hope I’m not ashamed so that *I* receive honor.” What Paul says is, “I hope that I’m not ashamed so that *Christ* receives honor.” Look at verse 20 again, *“I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.”* So what we find is that this verse isn’t really about Paul. This verse is about Jesus. It isn’t about Paul being honored and exalted. It’s about Jesus being honored and exalted. And what’s so amazing about that is it means that even when Paul’s talking about his life and his death, he’s still not talking about himself. He’s talking about Jesus. Paul’s life is not about Paul. Paul’s life is about Jesus. Even Paul’s death is not about Paul. Paul’s death is about Jesus.

And it is massively important for you to see this truth today. Your life is not about you. Your life is about Jesus. Your life is not about you being honored and exalted. Your life is about Jesus being honored and exalted. In fact, your life should be so much about Jesus being honored and exalted that even your death should be about Jesus being honored and exalted.

That’s why the title of the sermon and the very first question I asked today was, “What will people say at your funeral?” You may not have thought about it, but the question is not, “What will people say *about* *you* at your funeral?” The question is, “What will people say at your funeral?” Will they talk about Jesus? When they remember you, will they think of Jesus? When they think about your life, will they know beyond a shadow of a doubt that your entire life was for Jesus and your entire life was about Jesus? If people just talk about you at your funeral, then you’ve missed it in this life. But if people talk about Jesus at your funeral, then you got it right in this life.

I once read a story that Martin Luther King, Jr. was asked to preach the funeral of a man who neglected his kids, beat his wife, and blew his paycheck on drugs and alcohol his whole life. At the funeral, King walked up to the podium, opened his Bible, and quoted Ezekiel 18:20, *“A soul that sinneth shall surely die.”* And then he closed his Bible, walked off the platform, and took his seat… as everyone sat there in stunned silence.

It’s not what you usually hear at a funeral, but it’s the truth. I’ve noticed that most people who attend a funeral operate under the great assumption that no matter how “so-and-so” lived their life, they’ve landed safely in heaven anyway. And we need a reality check with some clear biblical truth right now. And that truth is this: If you reject the things of God and live like hell and spend your entire life far from Jesus, then when you die, you will go to hell and spend eternity far from Jesus. And the reason for that won’t be because God is unloving. It’ll be because you were foolish. Even more than that, you also need to know that even if you’re the greatest philanthropist ever and you start charities and give away millions of dollars and do all sorts of good things, but you scoff at the claims of Jesus, then you’ll still spend eternity in hell. And I don’t care what the preacher says about you at your funeral, you aren’t going to heaven, because he can’t preach you into a place that you rejected your entire life.

Some of you know that my grandfather died last November. He was a pastor for 40 years and in the ministry for almost 60 years. He also had cancer for the last 25 years of his life, so he had time to plan his funeral. And about 4 years ago, Papaw asked me if I would preach his funeral. Now, Papaw pastored multiple churches. He served as a Director of Missions for 20 years. He preached more sermons than any of us could count. And he led lots of people to Jesus. By almost anyone’s standards, he had a very successful ministry. And even more than that, he was a good man, a good husband, and a good father. And when we were talking about his funeral, Papaw told me, “I hope I’ve done some good with my life. But with all the churches I’ve pastored and all the sermons I’ve preached and all the ministry I’ve done and all the good I’ve tried to do as a husband and a father, I take all that and I set it aside, and I’m just going to ask for grace. You tell them that. Tell them that I trusted Jesus and His grace.”

Let me tell you something, Papaw got it right. The thing that matters most in your life is that your life be all about Jesus and His grace. What will people say at your funeral? Not, “What will people say *about* *you* at your funeral?” What will people say about Jesus at your funeral? Will Jesus Christ be exalted and honored and glorified in your life and in your death?

And in the rest of our time today, I want us to wrestle with that question. Will Jesus be exalted in your life and in your death? And we need to start by talking about what that even means. What does it mean to exalt Jesus? And how can we do it? Well, the word exalt translates the Greek word *megaluno*. *Mega* means great, big, huge. And *megaluno* means that you make something bigger, or you make it greater. The way we often translate the word is magnify. If you magnify something, you make it appear bigger… you make it appear greater.

Now, here’s a really important thought for us. There are actually two different ways that you can magnify something. One way is if you take something really, really small, and you use a microscope to make it appear bigger. If you put some bacteria under a microscope and magnify it, then you can see it and it looks bigger than it really is. But there’s also a second way that you can magnify something… not by looking through a microscope, but by looking through a telescope. And when you look through a telescope, you aren’t taking something really small and making it appear bigger than it really is. You’re taking something really big, and you’re starting to see it for what it really is. For example, if you look at the moon with your naked eye, the moon is actually much bigger than what you can see. And what a telescope does is that it magnifies the moon so that you come closer to seeing the moon for how big it really is.

And when we talk about magnifying Jesus… exalting Jesus… glorifying Jesus… we aren’t talking about being a microscope. We’re talking about being a telescope. Jesus isn’t small. He doesn’t need you to make Him bigger. He doesn’t need glory and honor from you, as if He’s going to shrivel up and die without your approval. No! Jesus is already great! Jesus is already huge! Jesus is already glorious! And your job is to be a telescope that shows people how big and great and glorious Jesus is. You exalt and magnify Jesus, not by adding anything to Him, but by showing who He really is. You show that He is the biggest and the greatest and the most important person who has ever lived. So when we talk about exalting Jesus in your life and in your death, we’re talking about living and dying in such a way that you show how great Jesus is.

And so the question for us then becomes, “How do we do that?” How do we live and die in such a way that everything about us exalts Jesus and show how great He really is? Our text today gives us at least four truths about how Jesus can be exalted in you, both in life and in death. The first truth is Jesus is exalted in your life when Jesus is your life. Look at the connection between verse 20 and verse 21. At the end of verse 20, Paul says, *“Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.”* And then at the beginning of verse 21, he explains how Christ will be exalted in his life. He says, *“For to me, to live is Christ.”* So the way Jesus is exalted in his life is that Jesus is his life. To live is Christ.

And there are at least two very important ways to understand the statement, *“To live is Christ.”* First, it means something that we’ve already talked about. It means that Paul’s entire life was about Jesus. *To live is Christ* means that everything Paul does is for Christ. For him, living is all about Christ. His entire life is Christ.

But there’s also a second and equally important way that we need to understand *“to live is Christ.”* It’s another way of saying what Paul says in Galatians 2:20, *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”* In that verse, Paul doesn’t just say that he lives for Christ. He says that Christ lives in him. His life is no longer him living in his own strength. His life is Christ living in him and him relying on the spiritual power of Christ by faith. Paul says he has been crucified with Christ. He has died to himself. His desires, his dreams, his plans, his power, his self-reliance and self-effort… all of that is dead. He no longer lives by himself. Instead, what lives is the Spirit of Christ in him, making him like Christ. So he’s not just saying that he lives for Christ. He’s also saying that the way he lives for Christ is that Christ lives in him and through him and as him.

So when Jesus is your life that means your life is about Jesus, your life is for Jesus, and your life is lived by relying on Jesus to live in you by faith. And all of that exalts Jesus. It exalts Jesus when you life is about Jesus and for Jesus, because you’re showing that Jesus is worthy of your life. You’re showing that Jesus is so valuable that He deserves to have your life. And then it also exalts Jesus when you live by faith and reliance on Him, because you’re showing that He’s the only one who can do this great spiritual work in you. He’s so great that you depend on Him completely. You depend on Him to be your life. So Jesus is exalted in your life when Jesus is your life.

That’s closely connected to our second truth. The second truth is that Jesus is exalted in your life when your life is about faith in Jesus. We just saw that to live is Christ means your life is trusting Christ and relying on Christ as His Spirit lives in you. Your life is faith in Jesus. We see this same truth another way in verses 22 and 25. In verse 22 Paul says, *“If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me.”* And then in verse 25, Paul explains what this fruitful labor will be. He says, *“Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith.”* The fruitful labor Paul is talking about is that he can help the Philippians continue to grow in their faith. In fact, he goes so far as to say, “I’m convinced that God is going to keep me alive, and the reason is so that I can help you keep growing in your faith.” So Paul has already said in verse 20, “If I’m alive, I want my life to exalt Christ.” And now he says, “And here’s how I’ll do that. I’ll exalt Christ by using my life to help you grow in your faith.” In other words, the way Paul exalts Christ is by teaching people to trust Christ more and more and more. He exalts Christ by teaching people to live by faith in Christ alone.

And I want you to think about why it exalts Christ when people trust Him in this way. John Piper gives a great illustration of this. He says, Imagine a “man comes up to you, shoves a bag of money in your hand, and says, ‘Would you deposit that for me? I don’t have time.’ And you ask, ‘Wait a minute. How can you trust me with this money? You don’t even know me.’ He says, ‘I know you. You don’t know me, but I know you. I’ve watched you from a distance. I’ve seen how you do your business. I’ve watched how you handle your family. I’ve asked ten people who know you well what they think and they’ve vouched for you 100%. You’ll do it.’ And he’s gone.

“You stand there holding this money with a tremendous sense of obligation, and how do you feel? You… feel… honored, tremendously honored. Because he has trusted you on good evidence… That’s the way it is with Jesus.”

When people trust Jesus… when you trust Jesus… it honors and exalts Jesus as one who is trustworthy. So if you want to exalt Jesus with your life, trust Jesus. Live by faith in Jesus. And teach and encourage and help and pray for other people to trust Jesus and live by faith in Jesus. You see, ultimately even our faith isn’t about us. Our faith is about Jesus. Our faith exalts Jesus as the one who’s worthy of our faith. When you trust Jesus, you exalt Jesus as being the one who is trustworthy. So Jesus is exalted in your life when your life is about faith in Jesus.

The third truth is that Jesus is exalted in your life when your joy is in Jesus. Look at verse 25 again and also verse 26. Paul says, *“Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.”*

Notice that twice in those two verses Paul mentions joy. In verse 25, he refers to *“joy in the faith”* and in verse 26 to *“joy in Christ Jesus.”* Jesus is exalted in your life when your life is full of joy because of Jesus. Why? Because when you’re filled with joy because of Jesus, you’re showing the world that Jesus is so good and so worthy and so enjoyable that He’s able to satisfy you and please you and cause you to rejoice.

And I want you hear me right here: This is a huge part of the reason why grumbling and complaining and a sour, unpleasant spirit is so sinful… because whether you mean to or not, you’re sending the message that Jesus isn’t enough to give you joy. It’s like if you were to ask me what I’m going to do on Friday night, and I said, “Well, I guess I’m going to go on a date with Christy. I don’t really want to, but you know, she is my wife, so it’s what I have to do. And I’ll probably buy her some flowers. I hate to spend the money, but I know I’m supposed to.”

That doesn’t honor Christy at all. In fact, it insults Christy, because it sounds like she’s not worth the time and money that the date requires. But if you ask me what I’m doing on Friday night, and I say, “I’m going on a date with Christy. It’s gonna be great! I’m going to give her a dozen roses and take her to Ruth’s Chris, and we’re going to spend the whole night together, just the two of us. I can’t wait!” And then maybe you say, “Well, I had an extra ticket to the Final Four, and I thought you might want to go.” And I say, “No, I’d rather be with Christy.” That honors Christy, not because I have a duty to her as her husband, but because I delight in her. I have joy in her. And my joy says, “She is so great as my wife that I want to be with her. I’m glad to give up other things to be with her, because she’s worth it. And I have more joy in her than I do in that other stuff anyway.”

Church, how much more should we have joy in Christ? How much more should all of our life be screaming, “Look at Jesus! Look how good Jesus is! Look how much joy He gives me! Look how valuable He is! I’ll give up everything for Him, because He’s worth it. And I’m not just doing it because I have to. I’m not just doing it because it’s my duty. I’m doing it because I want to. I’m doing it because He’s my delight. Jesus is my joy.” That exalts Jesus. Jesus is exalted in your life when your joy is in Jesus.

And that brings us to our fourth truth. We’ve seen how Jesus is exalted in your life. Now, how is Jesus exalted in your death? Jesus is exalted in your death when you show that Jesus is better than life itself. In order to see this truth, we need to connect verse 20, verse 21, and verse 23. At the end of verse 20, Paul says, *“Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.”* And then in verse 21 he explains how Christ is exalted in his death, *“For to me… to die is gain.”* And then in verse 23, Paul explains why to die is gain, *“I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.”* So the reason that dying is gain for Paul is because dying means he gets to be with Christ, and Christ is better than life. And if Paul’s death shows that Christ is better than life, then Paul’s death exalts Christ, because it shows how great Christ really is. It shows that Christ is more valuable than life itself.

And I want you to think about how powerful a statement this really is. Christ is worth more than everything in your life. John Piper says, “Christ is worth more than falling in love. Christ is worth more than marrying and having children. Christ is worth more than seeing my children grow up and become independent. Christ is worth more than making a name for myself. Christ is worth more than finishing my career. Christ is worth more than the dream spouse and the dream house and the dream cruise and the dream retirement.”

And he’s right. Christ is worth more. Christ is worth more than everything in your life. Church, I want you to imagine with me a 16-year-old girl who is on fire for Jesus and is called to go on a mission trip to South America one summer. Imagine that on the way down, her plane crashes and she dies before she ever gets there. She dies before she can graduate high school, before she can go to college, before she can get married, before she can have children, before she can experience so much of life. Is that a tragedy? No. That’s no tragedy. When she was living, she was living for Christ. And when she died, she went to be with Christ. And that’s as good as it gets. The very best stuff this world can offer – diplomas and degrees and college memories and weddings and honeymoons and children and grandchildren and retirement – some of it’s good… some of it’s really good… but Christ is better. Christ is better! And it’s not even close. Christ is better. Living for Christ is not a tragedy. And being with Christ is not a tragedy.

Let me tell you what’s a tragedy. A tragedy is a story I read about a man who died in 2005. His name was James Henry Smith, and he was a passionate Pittsburgh Steelers fan. Smith died of prostate cancer at the age of 55. And because of the nature of his illness, Smith’s death wasn’t sudden or unexpected, so his family was able to stage his viewing in his favorite spot. At the funeral home, Smith’s body was placed in a recliner with his feet crossed and a remote in his hand. He wore black and gold silk pajamas. A pack of cigarettes and a beer were at his side, and a high-definition TV played a continuous loop of Pittsburgh Steeler highlights. His sister said, “I couldn’t stop crying after looking at the blanket in his lap. He loved football and nobody did (anything) until the game went off. It was just like he was at home.” A longtime family friend called the viewing “a celebration,” and said, “I saw it and couldn’t even cry. People will see him the way he was.”

Listen, I don’t want to be disrespectful or harsh right here, but I do want to be honest. And honestly, that’s a tragedy. To be remembered as a fanatic whose greatest joy was watching 22 large, sweaty men push a leather pigskin up and down a spray-painted green field while lounging in your La-Z-Boy sipping a Bud Light is a tragedy! And I like football! But that’s not what life is about. And if that really is what James Smith lived his life for, that’s a tragedy, because he missed it.

And maybe that one doesn’t hit too close to home for you. Most of us aren’t *that* crazy about our sports teams… even when we’re cheering for the Cats or the Vols or even the Dores this year. But let me share another example that may hit closer to home. I read an interview with David Hasselhoff where he told *People* magazine that he wanted to be buried under his Hollywood star. When he was asked what he would like for his tombstone to say, he answered, “(I’ve got) a few ideas. ‘Been there, done that.’ I was gonna say, ‘Hoff and Running.’ Seriously though, I think it’ll just say ’Good friend, good father, had a blast.’”

That doesn’t sound nearly as crazy as being laid out in a La-Z-Boy in full-on Steelers garb, does it? I mean, Hasselhoff saying, “I want to be buried under the star that reminds people of my greatest accomplishment, and I want to be remembered as a good friend and good father who had a blast,” sounds normal to most people because it typifies how most people think. In fact, maybe it’s the way you think, “I’d like people to know I accomplished something in my life. And I’d like them to know I was a good friend, a good parent, and a lot of fun.” Sounds normal, doesn’t it? Here’s the problem: That response says, “I want you to remember me for what *I’ve* accomplished, for the fun *I’ve* had, for who *I* was.” And what it fails to say is, “I want you to remember the Savior of the world for what He accomplished. I want you to remember that He died on a cross, so I could find true life in Him. I want you to remember that He is the One who empowered me to be a good parent and a good friend and gave me incredible joy in life. When you think about me, remember Jesus, because Jesus is all that matters!”

If your life says anything else, that’s a tragedy! If your life doesn’t exalt Jesus Christ, that’s a tragedy! If your death doesn’t exalt Jesus Christ, that’s a tragedy! But if for you, living is Christ, and if for you, dying is gain because of Christ, then your life and your death take on the greatest value possible, because you exalt Jesus by showing that Jesus is better than life itself.

Is that true of you? Does the way you live your life show that Jesus is better than life itself? Do you love Jesus that much? Do you love Jesus so much that to lose everything in order to be with Him would be gain? Does your life say that Jesus is worth more than everything? Because He is. He is. Jesus is better than life itself.

So before we close, let me ask you one more time, “What will people say at your funeral?” Will they say something nice about you? Or will they say something great about Jesus?

I pray they’ll say something great about Jesus. I pray they’ll say you lived your life for Jesus. I pray they’ll say Jesus was your life. I pray they’ll say you lived by faith in Jesus. I pray they’ll say your joy was in Jesus. I pray they’ll say your life and your death exalted Jesus, because you knew that Jesus is better than life itself.