



LAKWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
Rev. Terence A. Lucarelli
June 13, 2010

WANTED: DEAD AND ALIVE!
Galatians 2:15-21

Think about this question: How do you live the Christian life?
Well, believe it or not, the answer is ... You don't!

Over one billion people have become Christians in the last 2,000 years. But only One Person has ever lived the Christian life ... and you know who that is. I am going to make an outlandish statement ... but I believe it to be true: The average Christian knows far more about how to BECOME one than how to BE one.

The average Christian [and I would have to say that probably applies to just about the entire group of us sitting in this place today] the average Christian will say something like; "I'm trying to live the Christian life the best way I know how." When I hear that kind of statement or when I make that kind of statement, I can pretty much say that we are almost certainly not doing a very good job of it.



There's a classic illustration about a man who was walking by a seaside cliff in the darkness. He thought he knew the path, but the path evidently had fallen away by erosion, and so he stepped over the cliff into the darkness. As he was falling he found an overhanging limb; he grabbed hold of it and he was dangling there with his feet in midair.

He began to scream at the top of his voice for help, but no one could hear him. His hands began to get weak, his palms clammy, his fingers began to ache. He said to himself, "I've just got to hold on; I've got to hold on; I can't fall." Beneath him he could hear the roaring waves and he could see in his mind the jagged rocks, but finally his strength was gone. His fingers relaxed their grip; he slipped and he fell ... three inches to a solid rock ledge that had been beneath his feet the entire time.

There are so many Christians who know they need to "go out and whip the world," but they're exhausted from trying so hard and getting beaten up ... they don't realize the solution lies right at their feet.

The single sentence that we are going to concentrate on from our passage today, in my mind, is one of those "must" memory verses. It is probably the most comprehensive, compact, complete description of the Christian life in the entire Bible: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Galatians 2:19b-20)

Now the truth of this sentence is simple ... Wanted: Dead and Alive! I know that sounds weird ... has Terry been watching a bunch of Western movies lately? No I haven't, but here is the central fact of the Christian life: If you are going to live as a Follower of the Way, you've got to die. Now I know that sounds paradoxical, but it is nevertheless true.

Let's see if we can make some sense of all this ...



The sentence begins by saying, "I have been crucified with Christ." Paul is telling us that two people have to die in order for this thing to work. Jesus and you!

Now, when I think about this idea that I have to die ... well, that just goes against the grain of human nature, human ambition, and human desire. The most common thing I put ahead of God is ... self. The greatest idol in the world today is self.

Shirley MacLaine (God love her) expresses it this way:

"The most pleasurable journey you take is through yourself...the only sustaining love involvement is with yourself...when you look back on your life and try to figure out where you've been and where you're going; when you look at your work, your love affairs, your marriages, your children, your pain, your happiness – when you examine all that closely, what you really find out is that the only person you really go to bed with is yourself...the only thing

you have is working to the consummation of your own identity, and that is what I've been trying to do all of my life."

(Charles Colson, *Loving God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), p. 1.)

Shirley is just expressing a natural tendency we are all born with. It's just like Toby Keith sings in his hit country song:

I wanna talk about me ... Wanna talk about I
Wanna talk about number one ... Oh my me my
What I think, what I like, what I know, what I want, what I see
I like talking about you you you you, usually, but occasionally
I wanna talk about meeeeeee

Well, the first step to making some sense of all this, as I'm sure you well know, is acknowledging Jesus' death for you. But the next step is experiencing your death to you.

If you study the Apostle Paul you'll find that he actually talks about three different kinds of death. First of all, he talks about the death to sin ... those things we know we need to change in our lives ... and by the indwelling Spirit can do. The second death is the death to self ... dying to what we want, what we desire; dying to our will. The third kind of death for Paul is the death to safety ... that's this whole idea of "taking up your cross" ... knowing that it might not be real comfortable all the time following Jesus.

Now Paul, in this verse, I believe is talking about all three types of death. What he is saying is this: Every day, for those of us who call ourselves "Christian", needs to start with a funeral ... ours. You need to die to sin, to self, to safety ... to anything that comes between you and God. That is exactly what Jesus meant when He said, "If any one is going to follow Me, they must take up their cross daily." (Luke 9:23) Billy Graham said it: "In every person's life there is a throne. When self is on the throne, Christ is on the cross; but when Christ is on the throne, self is on the cross."



Okay, okay ... I know that this idea of dying to self is extremely hard. In fact, I heard about a mother who was making pancakes for her two little boys for breakfast. Kevin, 5, and Ryan, 3 began to argue about who was going to get the first pancake. You know moms ... she saw the boys arguing and decided this would be a great opportunity to teach them a lesson. "Boy, boys ... If Jesus were sitting here He'd say, 'Let my brother have the first pancake, I can wait.'"

Upon hearing that, the older of the two, Kevin, thoughtfully turned to his younger brother and said, "Ryan, you be Jesus."

Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ." It is hard to grasp and harder to do, but maybe these words of Paul from Romans, chapter 6, as paraphrased by Eugene Peterson in *The Message* might help:

Could it be any clearer? Our old way of life was nailed to the cross with Christ, a decisive end to that sin-miserable life—no longer at sin's every beck and call! What we believe is this: If we get included in Christ's sin-conquering death, we also get included in his life-saving resurrection. We know that when Jesus was raised from the dead it was a signal of the end of death-as-the-end. Never again will death have the last word. When Jesus died, he took sin down with him, but alive he brings God down to us. From now on, think of it this way: Sin speaks a dead language that means nothing to you; God speaks your mother tongue, and you hang on every word. You are dead to sin and alive to God. That's what Jesus did.



The next part of that verse goes on to say, "It is no longer I who lives, but Christ lives in me." Is it starting to make any sense? The old you no longer lives. You have been crucified with Christ, but the new you has been raised with Christ ... definitely "alive" in a new way!

I know ... I know ... it is a strange kind of paradox to say that to be a Christian you got to die in order to live. But the fact is, if the new you is going to live, the old you must die. Therefore, I can use a title for my sermon like ... Wanted: Dead and Alive! Yeah, it still sounds strange, but according to Jesus the entire Christian life is a paradox. Jesus said the way to get is to give. He said the way to be first is to be last. He said the way to be over is to be under ... as in a servant.



The great 20th century theologian and Bible teacher, A.W. Tozer, put it this way [sorry for the lack of inclusive language, but this is the way Tozer wrote it]:

A real Christian is an odd number anyway. He feels supreme love for One whom he has never seen; talks familiarly everyday to Someone he cannot see, expects to go to heaven on the virtue of Another, empties himself in order to be full, admits he is wrong so he can be declared right, goes down in order to get up, is strongest when he is weakest, richest when he is poorest, and happiest when he feels the worst. He dies so he can live, forsakes in order to have, gives away so he can keep, sees the invisible, hears the inaudible, and knows that which passes knowledge.

So, you see don't you, in a sense the Christian is both Dead and Alive at the same time! And if I were to imagine the pearly gates ... there's probably a poster on those gates that reads, "Wanted: Dead and Alive!"



You still may be sitting there saying, "Terry, I just don't get it." Well, hopefully you are about to ... because there are four words in this text that really tell us what the Christian life is, and how to live it: "Christ lives in me."

And so, the first discovery we need to make as soon as we acknowledge that we are Christian is this: You and I cannot live the Christian life. It is "Christ living in me."

Let me say it another way: The Christian life is not your responsibility; it is your response to Christ's ability.

Just think about that word "Christian." It is actually a combination of two words: "Christ" & "in" ... "Christ" + "in" = "Christian."

Is the fuzziness beginning to clear for you? Are you beginning to see it? The Christian life is not you living for Jesus; it is Jesus living in you.



The great reformer, Martin Luther, once said, "When someone knocks at the door of my heart, I open it and they say, 'Who lives here?' I answer, 'Jesus Christ lives here.' Inevitably they will say, 'I thought Martin Luther lived here,' to which I say, 'Martin Luther used to live here, but he died. Jesus Christ lives here now.'"

That's it ... That is what I want you to see. A Christian is not someone trying their best to live for Jesus Christ. The Christian is someone who dies to self, who is crucified with Christ, so that Jesus can live through them.

That's why I can say ... Wanted: Dead and Alive!



One more thing needs to be said.

Paul finishes this verse by saying, "...and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." Folks, the only way to die to the old you is through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Think about it: The Bible says you and I are to live a crucified life ... in a sense that is an impossibility. Now you can shoot yourself, or hang yourself, or stab yourself, right? But there is no way you can crucify yourself ... that is physically impossible. Someone has to do it for you, and only the Holy Spirit of God can do that. And each of us ... EACH OF US ... has been given the gift of the Divine living right inside ... the Holy Spirit to do just that!

Paul can boldly make this statement: "...and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" he can make that statement because Paul knew that the Spirit of God was right here ... in his heart making his faith alive!

And so, the only reason I can become a Christian; the only reason I am a Christian; the only reason I can stay a Christian is because God loved me enough and you enough to let Jesus die, and three days later be resurrected, but then only to go away again so that you and I could receive that wonderful gift of the very Spirit of God!



What this all boils down to for me, can be described in one single simple sentence: Jesus gave His life for me – in order to take my life from me – so that he could live His life in me.



I read a story recently about a man and his four-year-old granddaughter. The man's son-in-law is a surgeon, and both his grandson and granddaughter were involved in the story. It's a great illustration of what I've been trying to explain to you.

The man was visiting his daughter when his son-in-law got a call one morning for an emergency surgery. When he got home after the emergency his son asked his dad about the surgery. He said, "Dad, did you have to cut the man open to see what was inside of him?"

The dad said, "Yes, son, I did."

He then asked, "Dad, did you see his lungs and his stomach, and could you see his heart?"

His dad said, "Yes, son, I could."

Well, at that moment his little four-year-old granddaughter who had been intently listening to the conversation, immediately looked up at her dad with big wide eyes of amazement, and said, "Dad, you saw his heart?"

The dad said, "Yes, I did."

She said, "Dad, did you see Jesus in his heart?"

Now that's kind of funny, but it expresses a great truth.

How do you live the Christian life ... you Don't.

This is what Christianity really is: When the old you dies and Jesus comes into your heart ... EVERYBODY can see him LIVING IN YOU.

Amen and Amen.