

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far. (NIV 84)

Theme: To die is Gain!

Marie was born on April 6, 1915. In less than three months Marie would have been 100 years old. Just think of all the things Marie saw during her lifetime—born during the middle of WW1, She would have seen WW2 and handful of other American wars, prohibition, the stock market crash, medical advancements, the age of technology and the internet—we could go on and on. She lived though and witnessed a lot in her 99-plus years.

“Quite an accomplishment” we might say. “It’s too bad she didn’t live to see 100; that would have been nice.” You see, we like it when those we love get to live a long life—full of years. And make no mistake about it; a long life is truly a gift of God. But do we really have a good reason to be disappointed that she didn’t make it to 100?

Just think of Marie’s life. It wasn’t always easy. It wasn’t always without pain, or sorrow, or weeping. Really, it was quite the opposite. You see, I didn’t know Marie all that well. I first visited her in her house about four and a half years ago—I only knew her for about 5% of her life. I’ve never really had an in depth conversation with her. By the time I met Marie, her disease had already settled in. She was able to answer some questions here and there, but you can tell that your mind wasn’t working quite right, there was a disconnect. And everyone hated to see her like that. Everyone hates to see loved ones suffer.

And really, it’s a result of sin. Marie, just like the rest of us, was born to sinful parents. That made her a sinner—born spiritual dead, unable to do anything pleasing to God. And she remained a sinner all the days of her life—just like us. She sinned each and every one of her days—countless times a day she sinned. And she lived in a sin-filled world. Marie felt the effects of sin in her own life and in the world day after day. We all do. None of us have lived a perfect life or had a perfect life because we are all sinners who live in a sin-filled world. And eventually we are all going to end up like Marie—dead. For **the wages of sin is death.**

So really, when you look at Marie and her life and death, you can say that she proves what Paul says in Philippians 1—to **die is gain**. Marie gains in death. The loss of death is not hers, but ours—we are no longer able to enjoy her company, see her smile, eat her rolls, or hear her kinds words coming out of her mouth. Her death is our loss. But her death is her gain. Right now Marie isn’t sad. Right now she isn’t upset that she didn’t make it to her 100th birthday. Right now, Marie is rejoicing.

That is because right now she is with her Savior. She is standing side-by-side with all her fellow believers—Willie included, singing the praises of God her Savior. John in Revelation gives us this glimpse of the glories and riches of heaven that Marie is enjoying: **I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”** That is the life Marie joins right now. No more sickness or disease. No weeping, crying, or pain. No death. Just a perfect life with Jesus forever.

And not just a perfect life, but a perfect body. Paul explains in Philippians 3, **Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.** On the Last Day the Lord will raise all our bodies, and Marie’s body will join her soul in heaven. In a glorious and perfect state—just like Jesus, her body and soul will dwell together forever with her Savior!

How has Marie come to enjoy such a wonderful gift? Only by Christ. You see, it was Jesus who lived a perfect life that Marie and the rest of us did not. And he gave Marie that perfect life as he took her sins upon the cross. He became guilty of everything the entire world has ever done wrong. Each and every sin ever committed was put on Jesus’ shoulders when he was hanging on the cross. And he suffered through the eternal punishment that we sins deserved when he was forsaken by his heavenly father. So he took away Marie’s sins and paid for them and credited his perfect life to her. And three days after

his death Jesus rose from the dead. His resurrection is a guarantee that we too will rise from the dead. As Jesus told his disciples, **Because I live, you also will live.**

He also said, **I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.** Everything given to us by Christ—the forgiveness of sins, his perfect life, and his victory over death is received only through faith in him. Marie believed that by his grace Jesus, true God and true Man, gave up his life only to rise again so that we would rise when we die. She believed that is by God's grace alone—apart from anything we have ever done or will ever do, that we are saved. And through that faith Marie has received the crown of life.

The same can be said of you. This doesn't have to be the last time you see Marie. This isn't a goodbye for good. This is a goodbye for now—it's a "see-you-later." Jesus lived, suffered, died, and rose for you just as he did Marie. All who believe in Jesus as the world's Savior will join Marie in heaven one day. And like Marie will you enjoy a perfect life with a perfect and glorious body forever.

Right before Paul said, **to die is gain;** he said, **for me to live is Christ.** Marie lived her faith. I've heard countless stories of her and Willie always making it a priority to worship their Lord and Savior. And how much they loved and cherished his house. And how they showed others the love of Christ by living that life of love as they dealt with others. I didn't really know that Marie that well. But I do know that even though toward the end when she couldn't communicate too well—her memory all but gone, she was still able to recite the Lord's Prayer. For Marie, to live was Christ.

But she would agree, to be with Christ is far better. So mourn now, that is okay. Mourn for ourselves. But don't mourn for Marie, her death is her gain. Be comforted and encouraged that through Christ you will see Marie later. Soon you will join Marie and all fellow believers in heaven. And there with perfect and glorious bodies you will stand side-by-side praising Jesus forever. And then you will see first hand that to die is gain. Amen.