

BEDWELL GLOBAL MINISTRIES EXPOSITORY SERMON

AUGUST 2015

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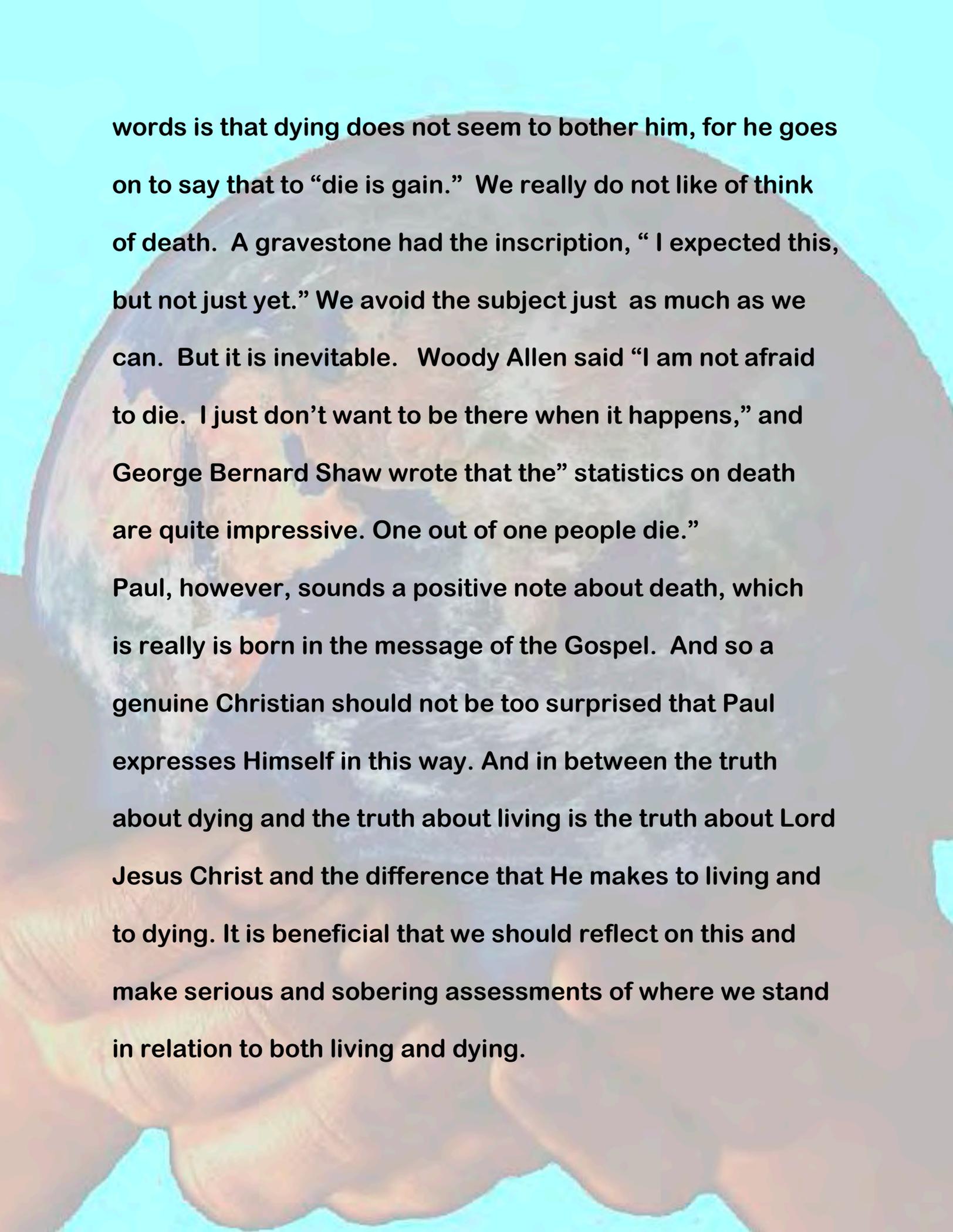
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PAUL'S GREAT PRIORITY IN LIFE

Scripture Reading - Philippians 1:12-24.

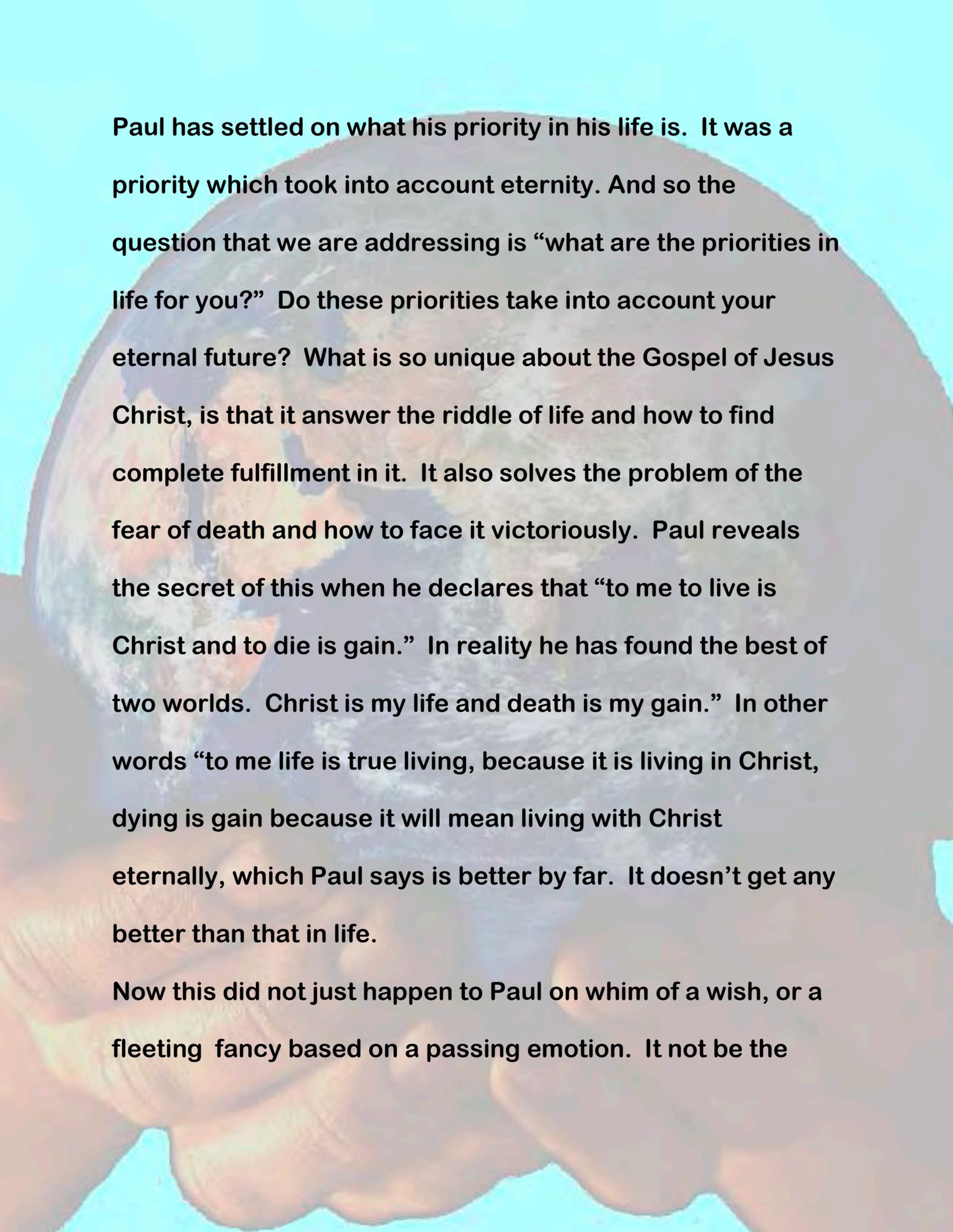
Text - Philippians 1:21.

In concise and succinct words Paul reveals what the greatest priority of his life is. In verse twenty he says “For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” These words come to us with force and conviction because they are his personal testimony. There are two words in this testimony that gripped my attention. They are “live” and “die.” They refer two vital activities which are important to us. Both of which we do. Generally we enjoy living, but this business of dying we are not too excited about. But it is inevitable, and all of us have to do some time. What is striking about Paul’s



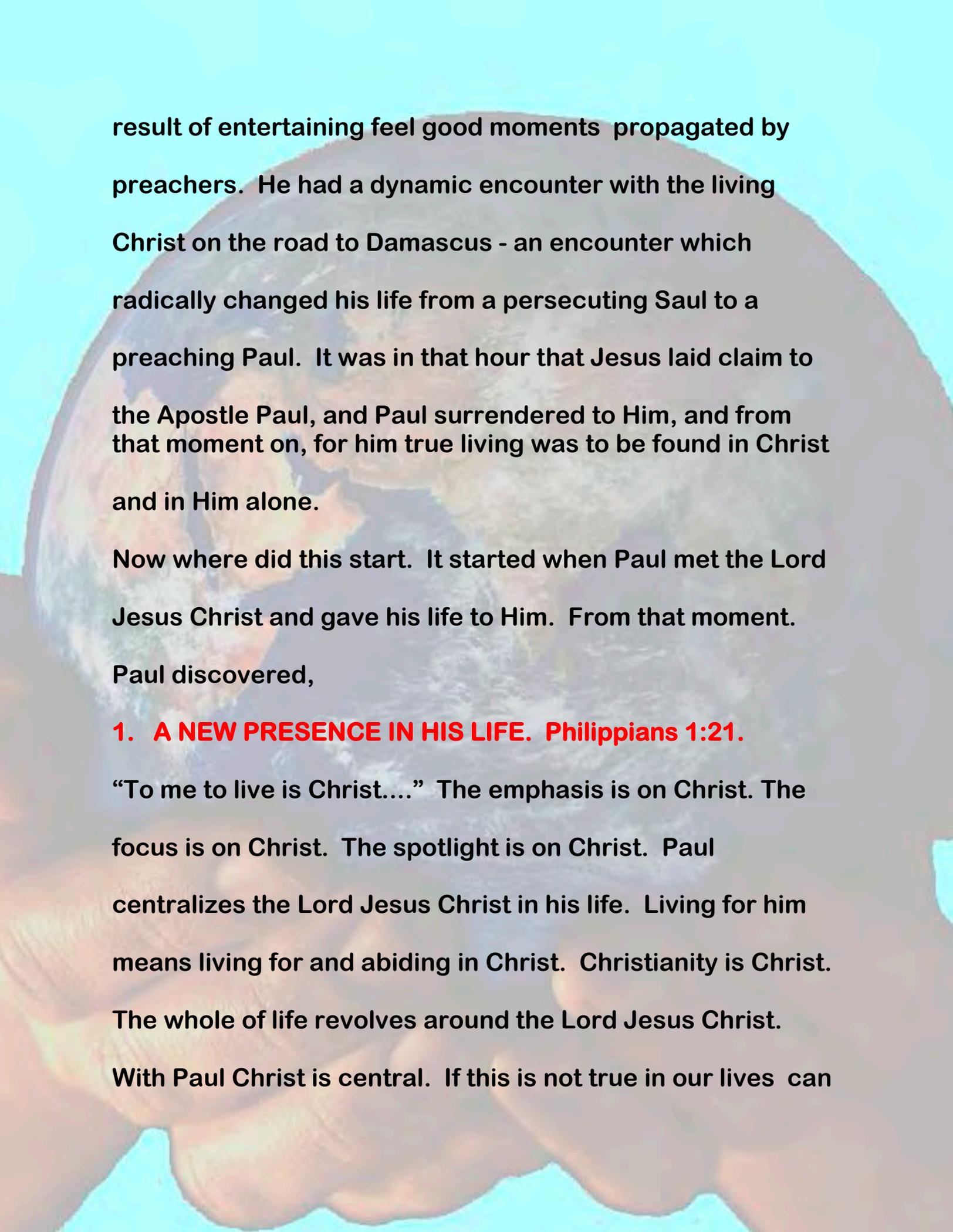
words is that dying does not seem to bother him, for he goes on to say that to “die is gain.” We really do not like of think of death. A gravestone had the inscription, “ I expected this, but not just yet.” We avoid the subject just as much as we can. But it is inevitable. Woody Allen said “I am not afraid to die. I just don’t want to be there when it happens,” and George Bernard Shaw wrote that the” statistics on death are quite impressive. One out of one people die.”

Paul, however, sounds a positive note about death, which is really is born in the message of the Gospel. And so a genuine Christian should not be too surprised that Paul expresses Himself in this way. And in between the truth about dying and the truth about living is the truth about Lord Jesus Christ and the difference that He makes to living and to dying. It is beneficial that we should reflect on this and make serious and sobering assessments of where we stand in relation to both living and dying.



Paul has settled on what his priority in his life is. It was a priority which took into account eternity. And so the question that we are addressing is “what are the priorities in life for you?” Do these priorities take into account your eternal future? What is so unique about the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is that it answer the riddle of life and how to find complete fulfillment in it. It also solves the problem of the fear of death and how to face it victoriously. Paul reveals the secret of this when he declares that “to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” In reality he has found the best of two worlds. Christ is my life and death is my gain.” In other words “to me life is true living, because it is living in Christ, dying is gain because it will mean living with Christ eternally, which Paul says is better by far. It doesn’t get any better than that in life.

Now this did not just happen to Paul on whim of a wish, or a fleeting fancy based on a passing emotion. It not be the

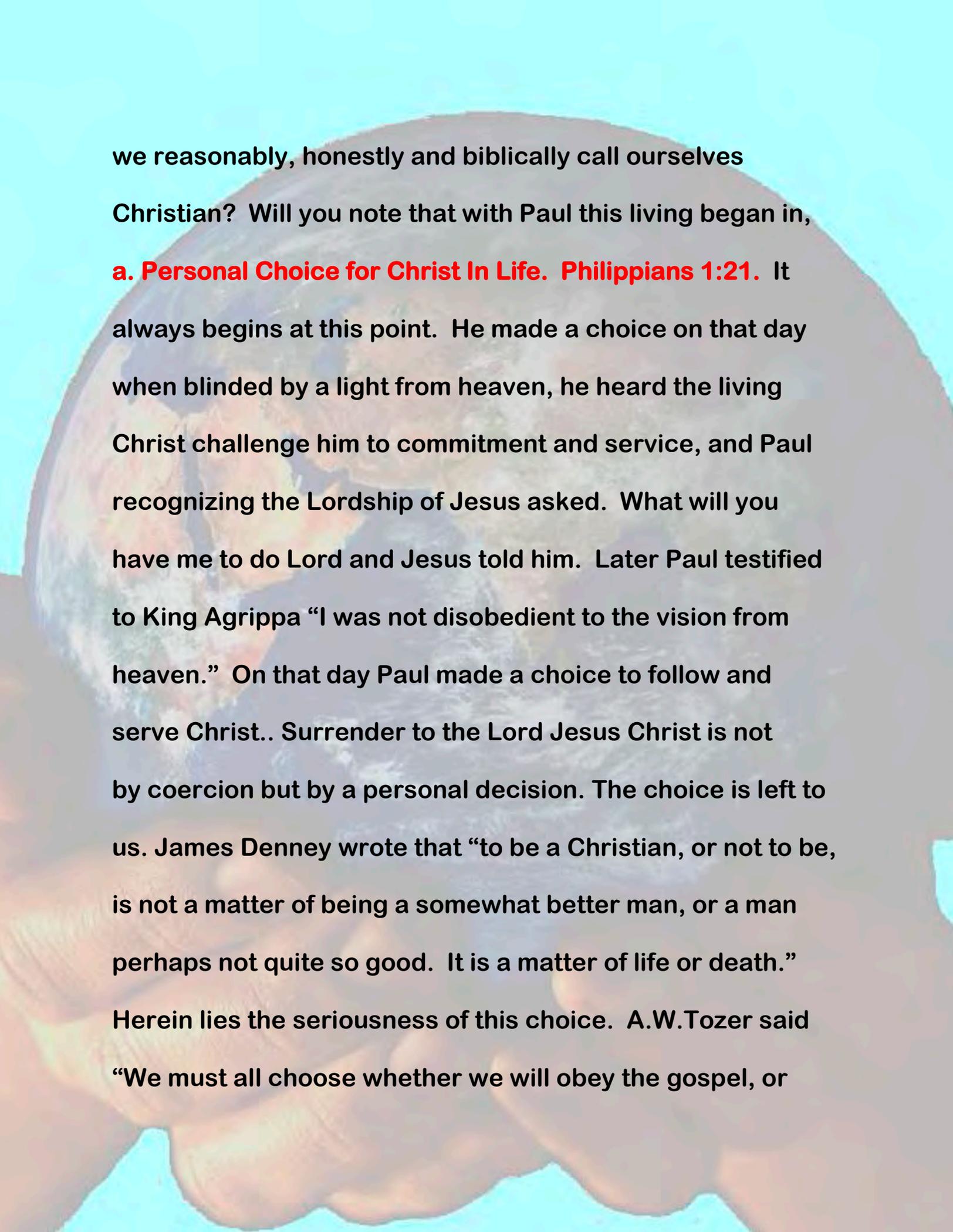


result of entertaining feel good moments propagated by preachers. He had a dynamic encounter with the living Christ on the road to Damascus - an encounter which radically changed his life from a persecuting Saul to a preaching Paul. It was in that hour that Jesus laid claim to the Apostle Paul, and Paul surrendered to Him, and from that moment on, for him true living was to be found in Christ and in Him alone.

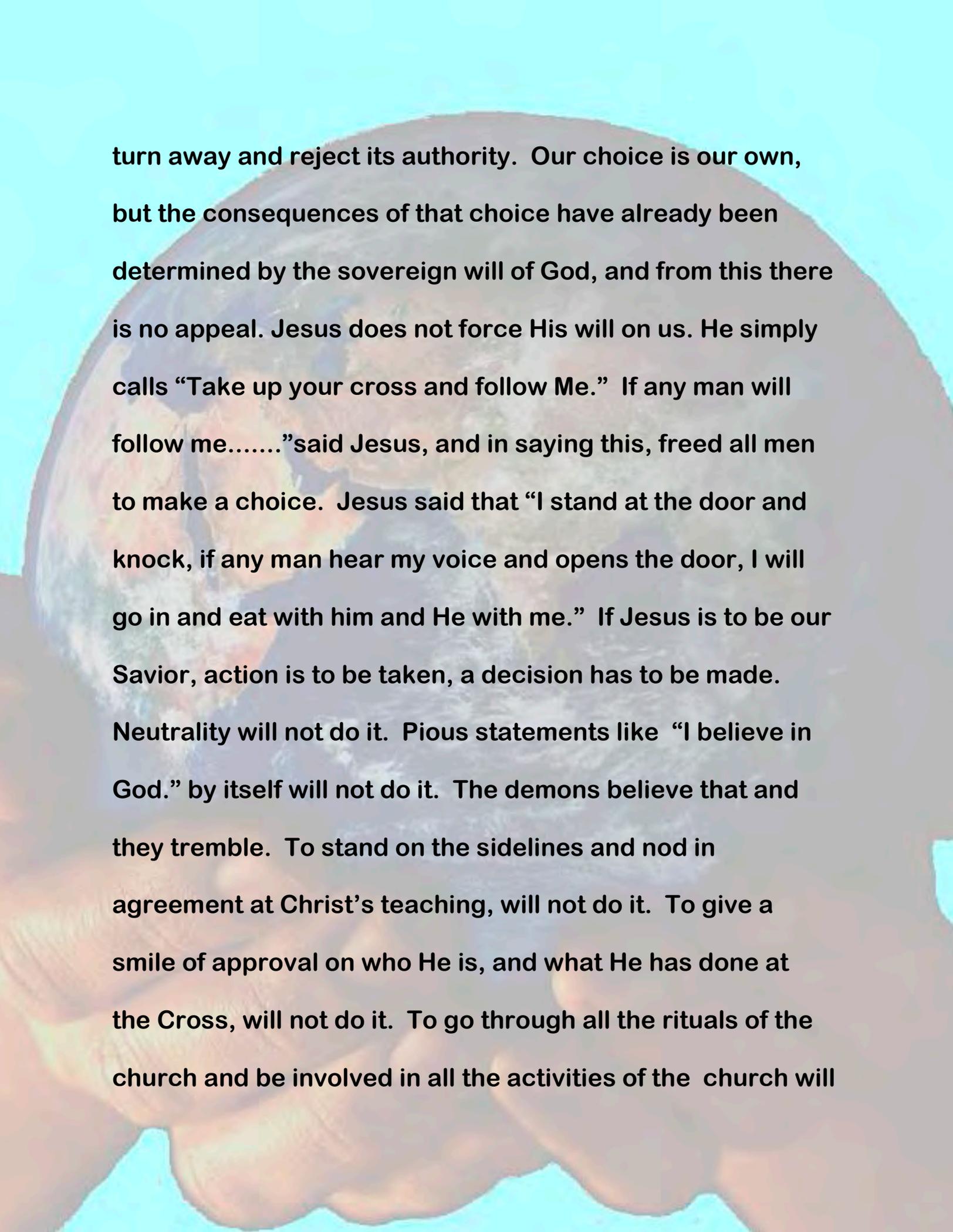
Now where did this start. It started when Paul met the Lord Jesus Christ and gave his life to Him. From that moment Paul discovered,

1. A NEW PRESENCE IN HIS LIFE. Philippians 1:21.

“To me to live is Christ....” The emphasis is on Christ. The focus is on Christ. The spotlight is on Christ. Paul centralizes the Lord Jesus Christ in his life. Living for him means living for and abiding in Christ. Christianity is Christ. The whole of life revolves around the Lord Jesus Christ. With Paul Christ is central. If this is not true in our lives can



we reasonably, honestly and biblically call ourselves Christian? Will you note that with Paul this living began in, **a. Personal Choice for Christ In Life. Philippians 1:21.** It always begins at this point. He made a choice on that day when blinded by a light from heaven, he heard the living Christ challenge him to commitment and service, and Paul recognizing the Lordship of Jesus asked. What will you have me to do Lord and Jesus told him. Later Paul testified to King Agrippa “I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven.” On that day Paul made a choice to follow and serve Christ.. Surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ is not by coercion but by a personal decision. The choice is left to us. James Denney wrote that “to be a Christian, or not to be, is not a matter of being a somewhat better man, or a man perhaps not quite so good. It is a matter of life or death.” Herein lies the seriousness of this choice. A.W.Tozer said “We must all choose whether we will obey the gospel, or



turn away and reject its authority. Our choice is our own, but the consequences of that choice have already been determined by the sovereign will of God, and from this there is no appeal. Jesus does not force His will on us. He simply calls “Take up your cross and follow Me.” If any man will follow me.....”said Jesus, and in saying this, freed all men to make a choice. Jesus said that “I stand at the door and knock, if any man hear my voice and opens the door, I will go in and eat with him and He with me.” If Jesus is to be our Savior, action is to be taken, a decision has to be made. Neutrality will not do it. Pious statements like “I believe in God.” by itself will not do it. The demons believe that and they tremble. To stand on the sidelines and nod in agreement at Christ’s teaching, will not do it. To give a smile of approval on who He is, and what He has done at the Cross, will not do it. To go through all the rituals of the church and be involved in all the activities of the church will

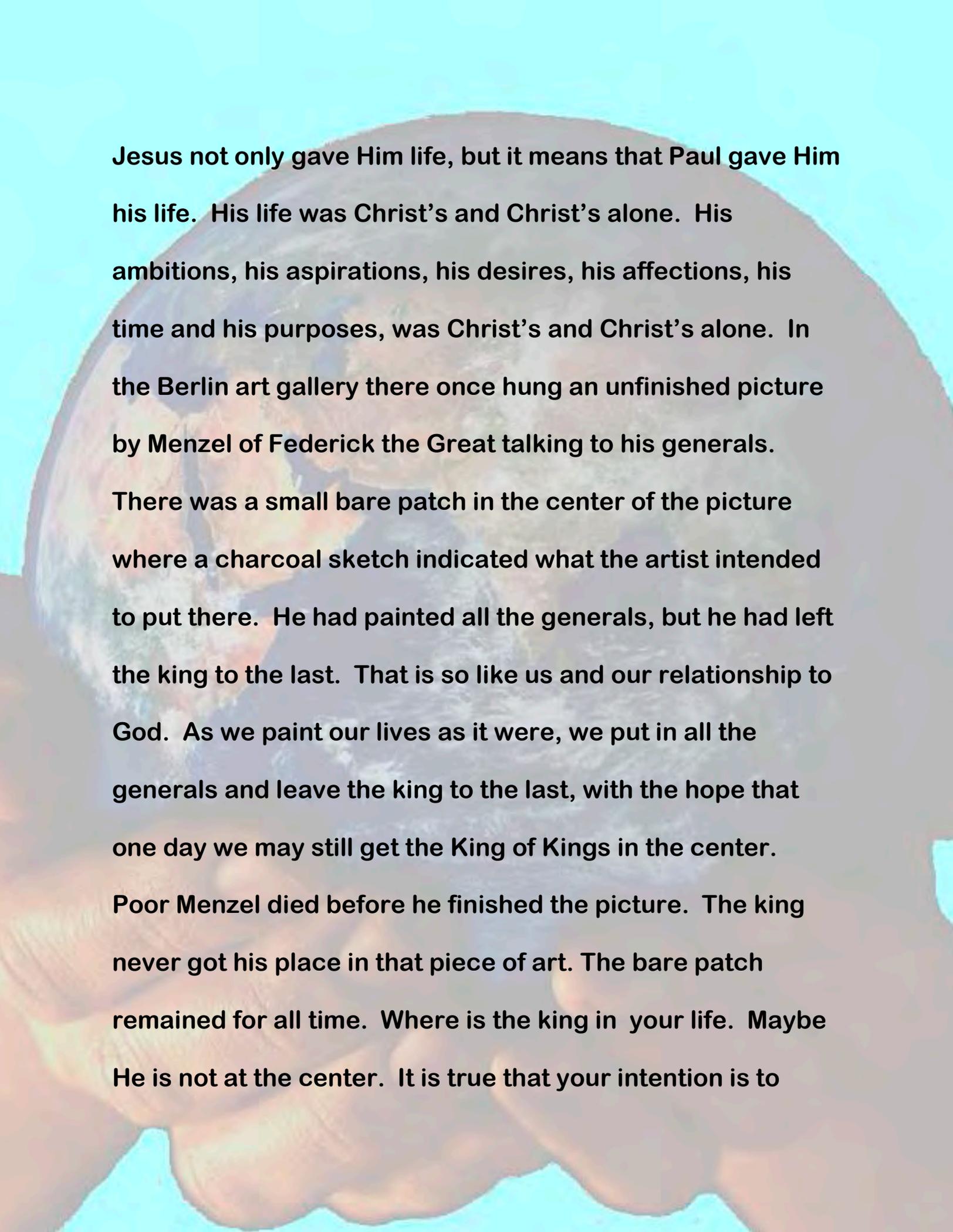
not do it. A choice has to be made. A choice summed up in the phrase: "To me to live is Christ." Tied in closely with the personal choice that Paul made was,

b. A Personal Commitment to Christ In His life. Philippians 1:21. "To me to live is Christ."

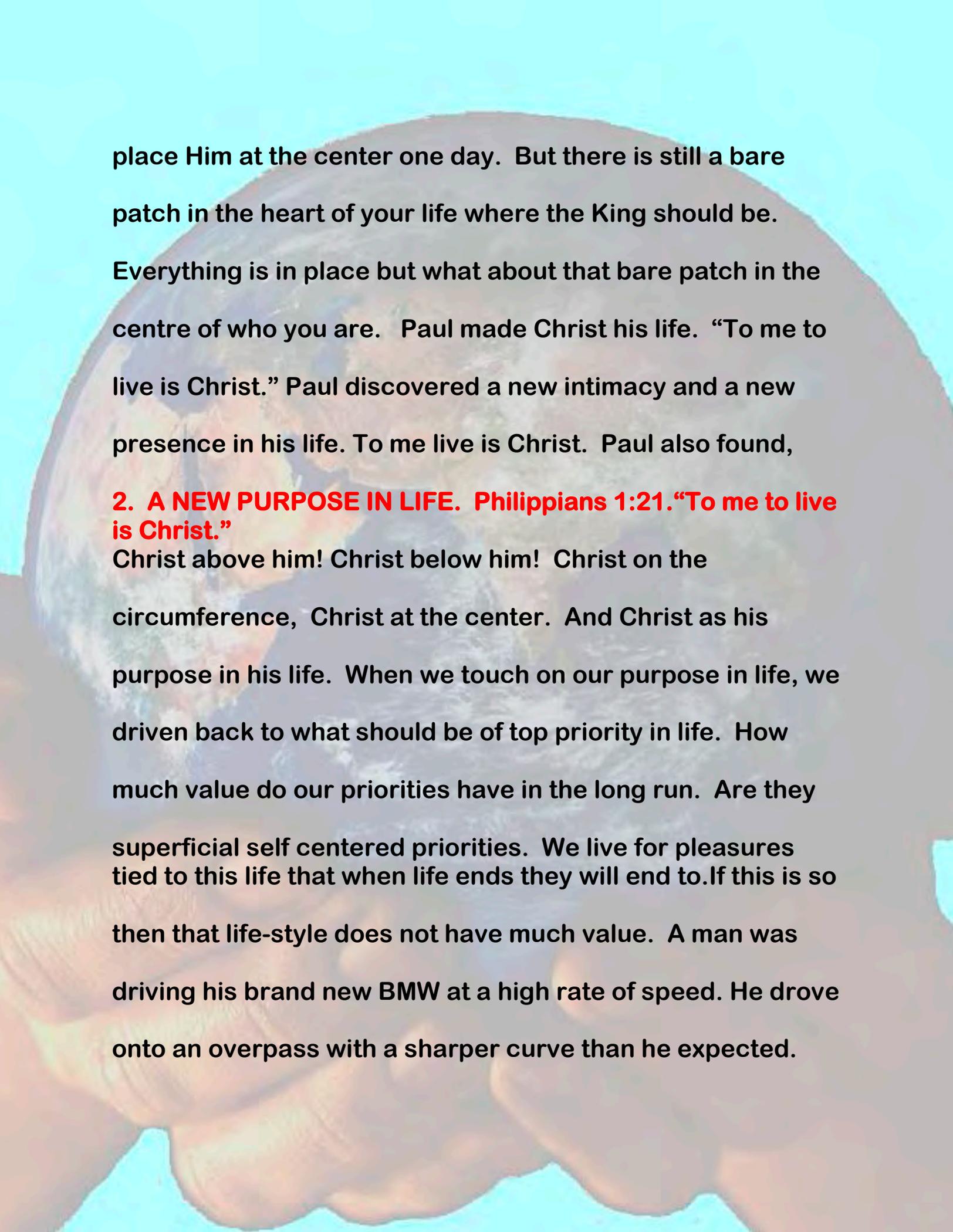
The Living Translation has it "For to me living is for Christ. "

Paul was intense about everything he did. He was the complete Jew. A Jew of the highest order. He Himself had said that he was a Pharisee of the Pharisees as for legalistic righteousness he was faultless. In his persecution of the Christians he was passionately zealous. He was highly respected as devoted Jew, but in the 3rd chapter of this letter he said, "I once thought all these things were so very important, but now I consider them rubbish or dung, that I may gain Christ. In his letter to the Romans and in the paraphrase of J.B. Phillips, Paul says "I am Christ's man from head to foot. And he says "to me to live is Christ."

What does this mean.? What does it involve? It means that



Jesus not only gave Him life, but it means that Paul gave Him his life. His life was Christ's and Christ's alone. His ambitions, his aspirations, his desires, his affections, his time and his purposes, was Christ's and Christ's alone. In the Berlin art gallery there once hung an unfinished picture by Menzel of Frederick the Great talking to his generals. There was a small bare patch in the center of the picture where a charcoal sketch indicated what the artist intended to put there. He had painted all the generals, but he had left the king to the last. That is so like us and our relationship to God. As we paint our lives as it were, we put in all the generals and leave the king to the last, with the hope that one day we may still get the King of Kings in the center. Poor Menzel died before he finished the picture. The king never got his place in that piece of art. The bare patch remained for all time. Where is the king in your life. Maybe He is not at the center. It is true that your intention is to

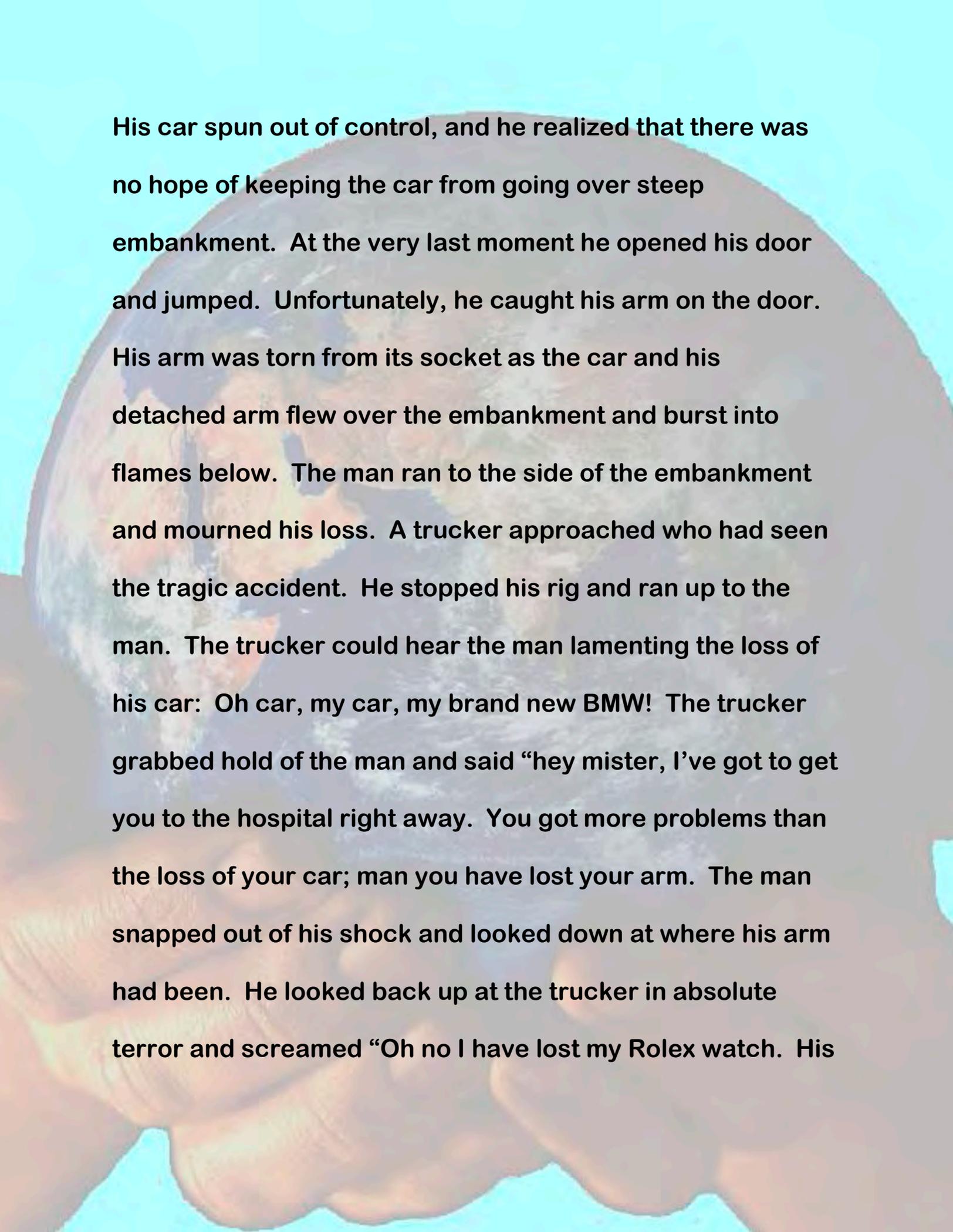


place Him at the center one day. But there is still a bare patch in the heart of your life where the King should be.

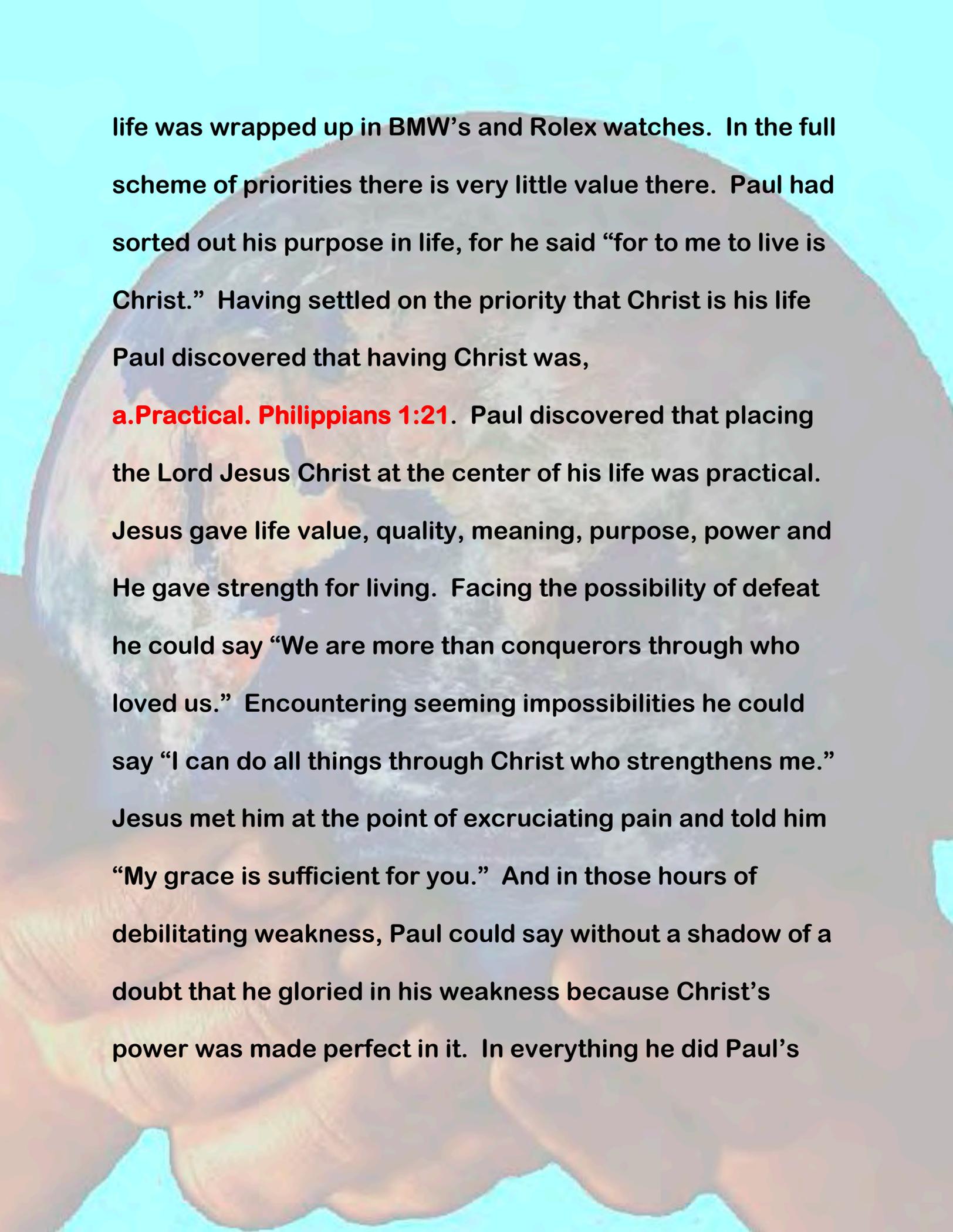
Everything is in place but what about that bare patch in the centre of who you are. Paul made Christ his life. “To me to live is Christ.” Paul discovered a new intimacy and a new presence in his life. To me live is Christ. Paul also found,

2. A NEW PURPOSE IN LIFE. Philippians 1:21. “To me to live is Christ.”

Christ above him! Christ below him! Christ on the circumference, Christ at the center. And Christ as his purpose in his life. When we touch on our purpose in life, we driven back to what should be of top priority in life. How much value do our priorities have in the long run. Are they superficial self centered priorities. We live for pleasures tied to this life that when life ends they will end to. If this is so then that life-style does not have much value. A man was driving his brand new BMW at a high rate of speed. He drove onto an overpass with a sharper curve than he expected.

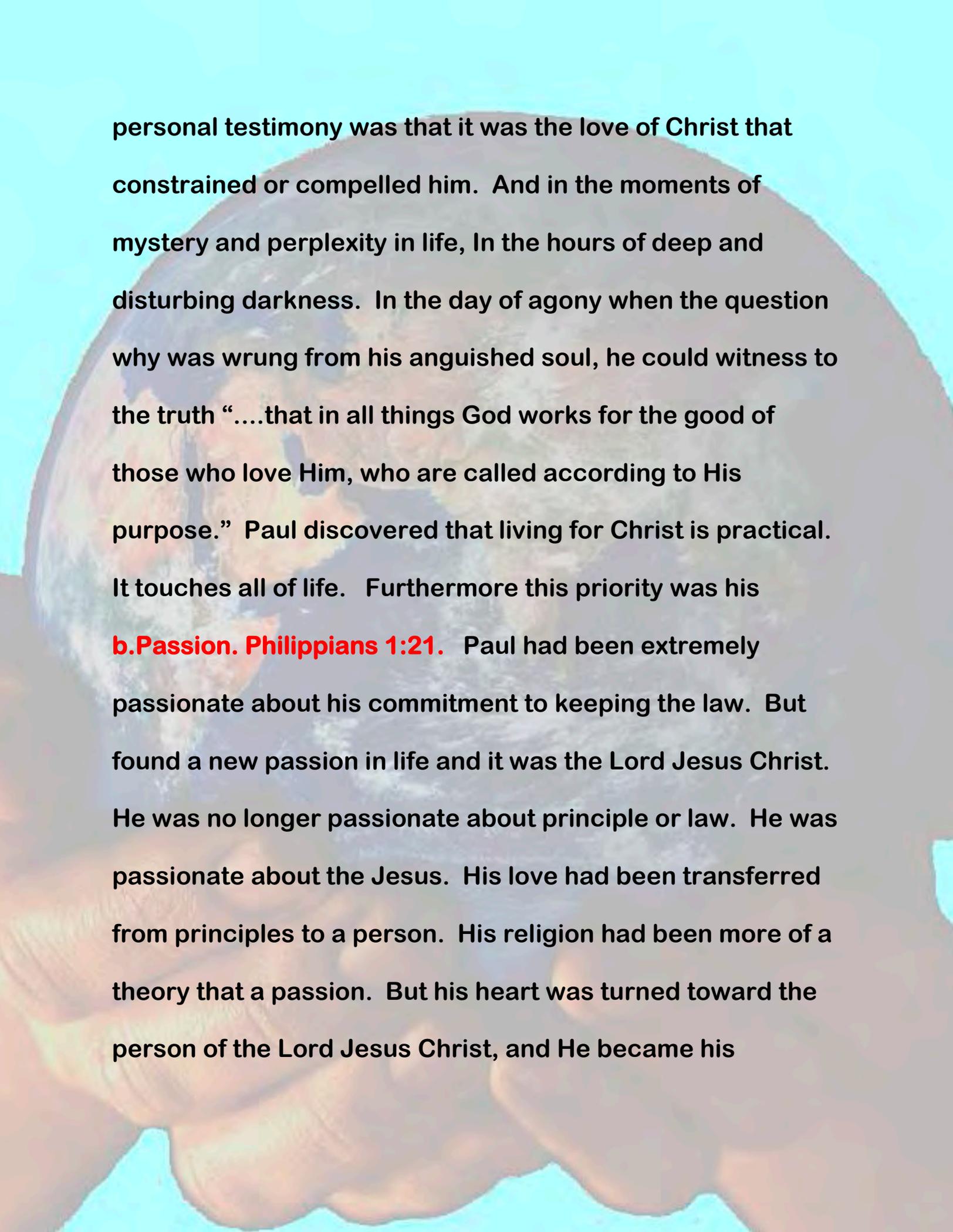
A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a small, dark, rectangular object, possibly a watch or a piece of jewelry, against a blurred background. The hand is positioned in the lower half of the frame, with the fingers gripping the object. The background is out of focus, showing what appears to be a person's face and upper body in a dimly lit setting. The overall tone is somber and dramatic.

His car spun out of control, and he realized that there was no hope of keeping the car from going over steep embankment. At the very last moment he opened his door and jumped. Unfortunately, he caught his arm on the door. His arm was torn from its socket as the car and his detached arm flew over the embankment and burst into flames below. The man ran to the side of the embankment and mourned his loss. A trucker approached who had seen the tragic accident. He stopped his rig and ran up to the man. The trucker could hear the man lamenting the loss of his car: Oh car, my car, my brand new BMW! The trucker grabbed hold of the man and said “hey mister, I’ve got to get you to the hospital right away. You got more problems than the loss of your car; man you have lost your arm. The man snapped out of his shock and looked down at where his arm had been. He looked back up at the trucker in absolute terror and screamed “Oh no I have lost my Rolex watch. His

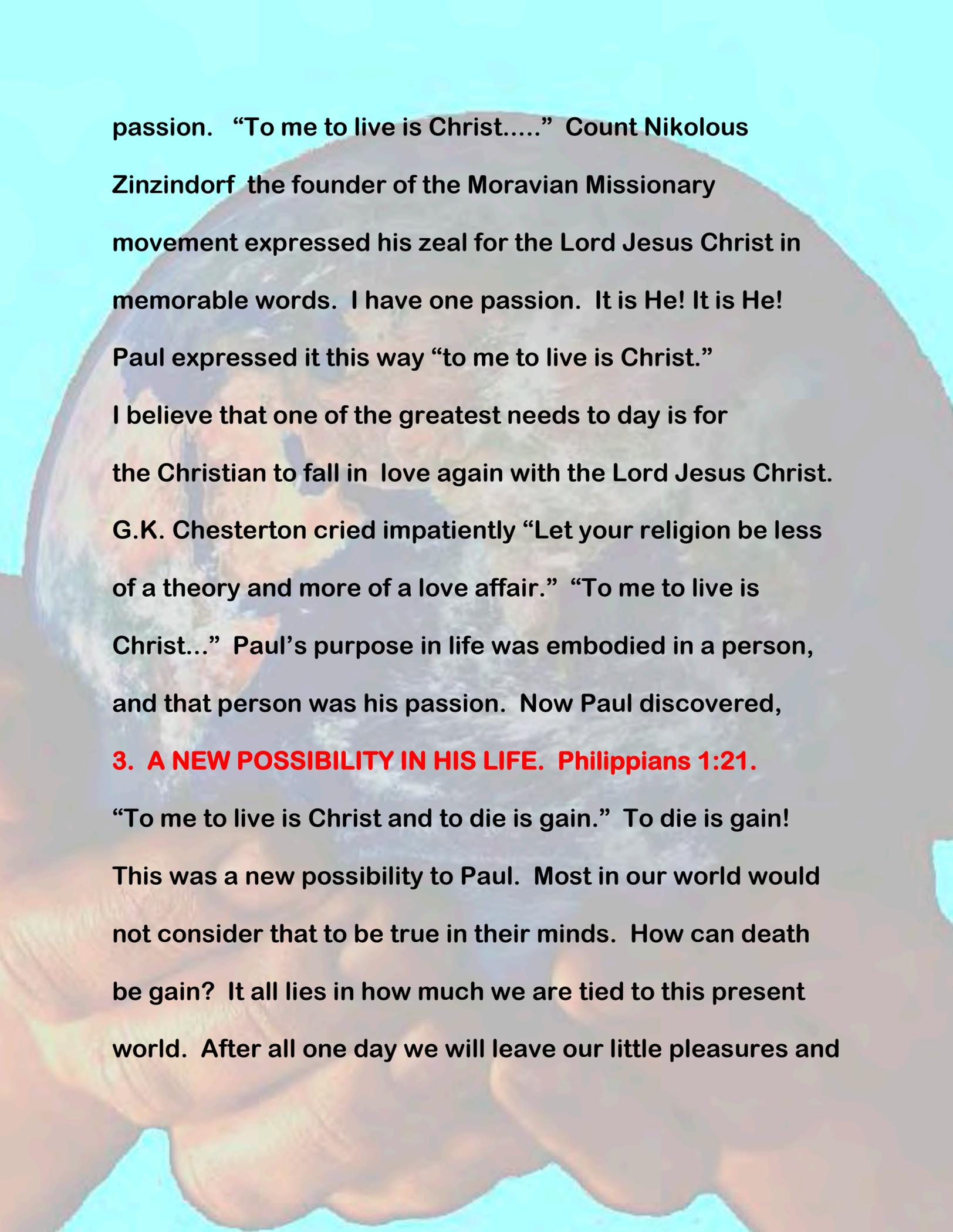


life was wrapped up in BMW's and Rolex watches. In the full scheme of priorities there is very little value there. Paul had sorted out his purpose in life, for he said "for to me to live is Christ." Having settled on the priority that Christ is his life Paul discovered that having Christ was,

a. Practical. Philippians 1:21. Paul discovered that placing the Lord Jesus Christ at the center of his life was practical. Jesus gave life value, quality, meaning, purpose, power and He gave strength for living. Facing the possibility of defeat he could say "We are more than conquerors through who loved us." Encountering seeming impossibilities he could say "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Jesus met him at the point of excruciating pain and told him "My grace is sufficient for you." And in those hours of debilitating weakness, Paul could say without a shadow of a doubt that he gloried in his weakness because Christ's power was made perfect in it. In everything he did Paul's



personal testimony was that it was the love of Christ that constrained or compelled him. And in the moments of mystery and perplexity in life, In the hours of deep and disturbing darkness. In the day of agony when the question why was wrung from his anguished soul, he could witness to the truth “....that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose.” Paul discovered that living for Christ is practical. It touches all of life. Furthermore this priority was his **b.Passion. Philippians 1:21.** Paul had been extremely passionate about his commitment to keeping the law. But found a new passion in life and it was the Lord Jesus Christ. He was no longer passionate about principle or law. He was passionate about the Jesus. His love had been transferred from principles to a person. His religion had been more of a theory that a passion. But his heart was turned toward the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and He became his



passion. “To me to live is Christ.....” Count Nikolous Zinzendorf the founder of the Moravian Missionary movement expressed his zeal for the Lord Jesus Christ in memorable words. I have one passion. It is He! It is He! Paul expressed it this way “to me to live is Christ.”

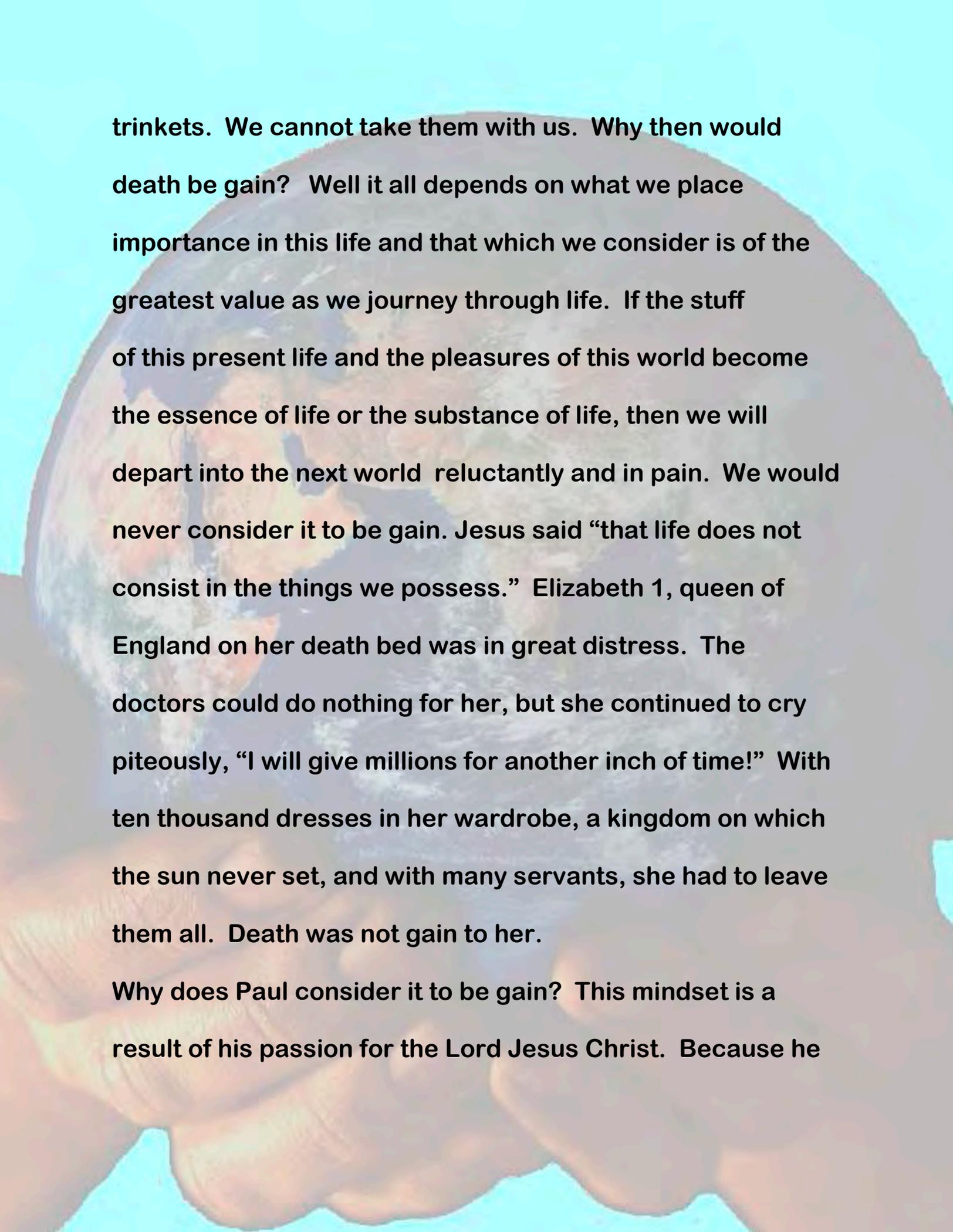
I believe that one of the greatest needs to day is for the Christian to fall in love again with the Lord Jesus Christ.

G.K. Chesterton cried impatiently “Let your religion be less of a theory and more of a love affair.” “To me to live is Christ...” Paul’s purpose in life was embodied in a person, and that person was his passion. Now Paul discovered,

3. A NEW POSSIBILITY IN HIS LIFE. Philippians 1:21.

“To me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” To die is gain!

This was a new possibility to Paul. Most in our world would not consider that to be true in their minds. How can death be gain? It all lies in how much we are tied to this present world. After all one day we will leave our little pleasures and



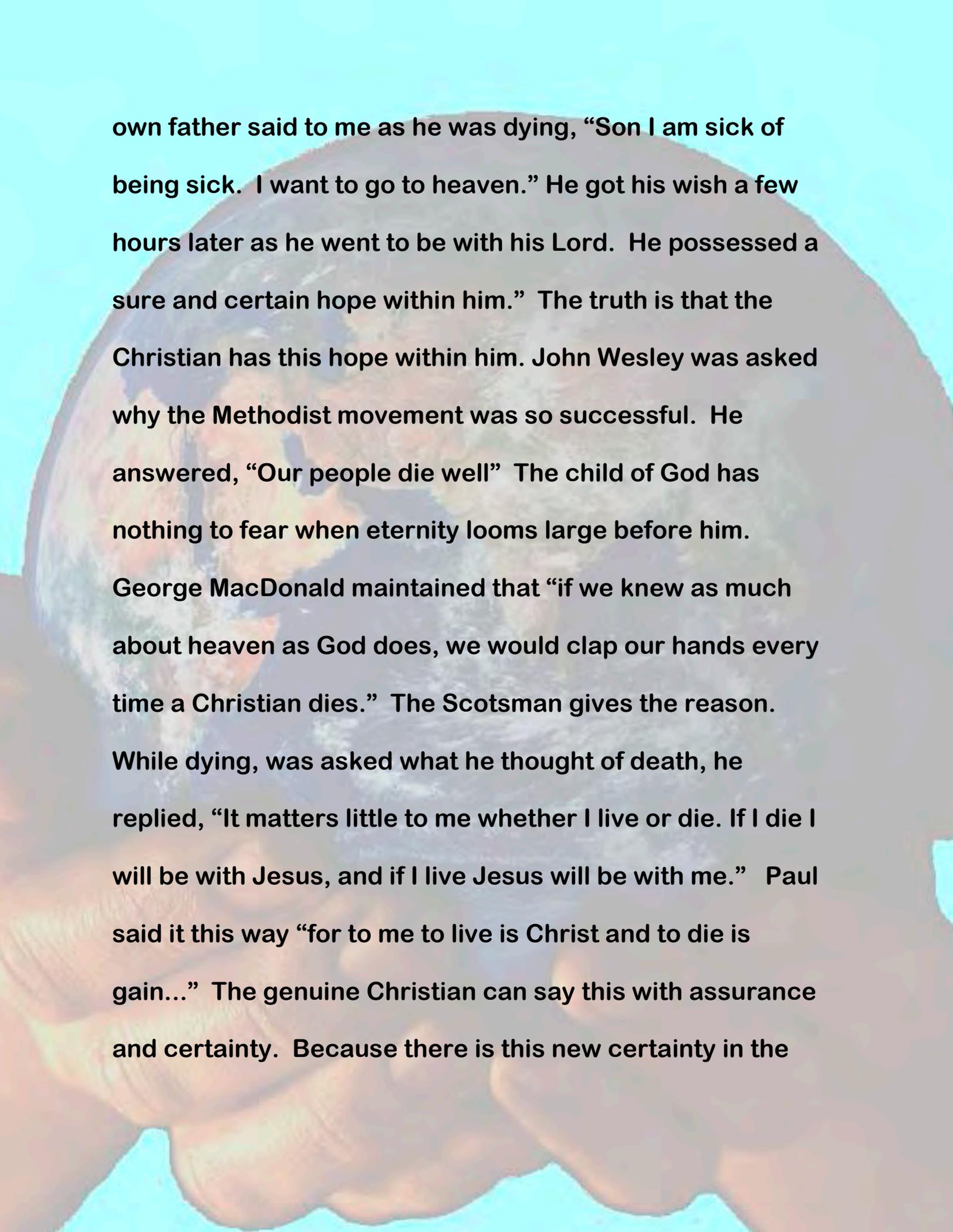
trinkets. We cannot take them with us. Why then would death be gain? Well it all depends on what we place importance in this life and that which we consider is of the greatest value as we journey through life. If the stuff of this present life and the pleasures of this world become the essence of life or the substance of life, then we will depart into the next world reluctantly and in pain. We would never consider it to be gain. Jesus said “that life does not consist in the things we possess.” Elizabeth 1, queen of England on her death bed was in great distress. The doctors could do nothing for her, but she continued to cry piteously, “I will give millions for another inch of time!” With ten thousand dresses in her wardrobe, a kingdom on which the sun never set, and with many servants, she had to leave them all. Death was not gain to her.

Why does Paul consider it to be gain? This mindset is a result of his passion for the Lord Jesus Christ. Because he

loves Jesus death means that he will see Him and live with Him for ever. Notice what he says in verse Philipians 1: 23 “.....I desire to depart and be Christ which is better by far...”

With Paul eternal is a joyful expectation but with him it is also,

a.New Certainty. Philipians 1:21-23. To Paul the issue of eternal life was settled for all time. It was a non debatable certainty. To die is gain. His life was centered in the Lord Jesus Christ - His passion was so Intense for Christ - that death would be welcome because he would be with Christ who was His life. “I desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is better by far.” This not a death wish with Paul. It is a desire to be with the Lord he loved. My old grandfather was a preacher who was mightily used of God through out the British Isles. As he grew older he would say to the Lord “when I’m to old to preach, give me strength to pray. And when I’m to old to pray take me home to heaven.” My



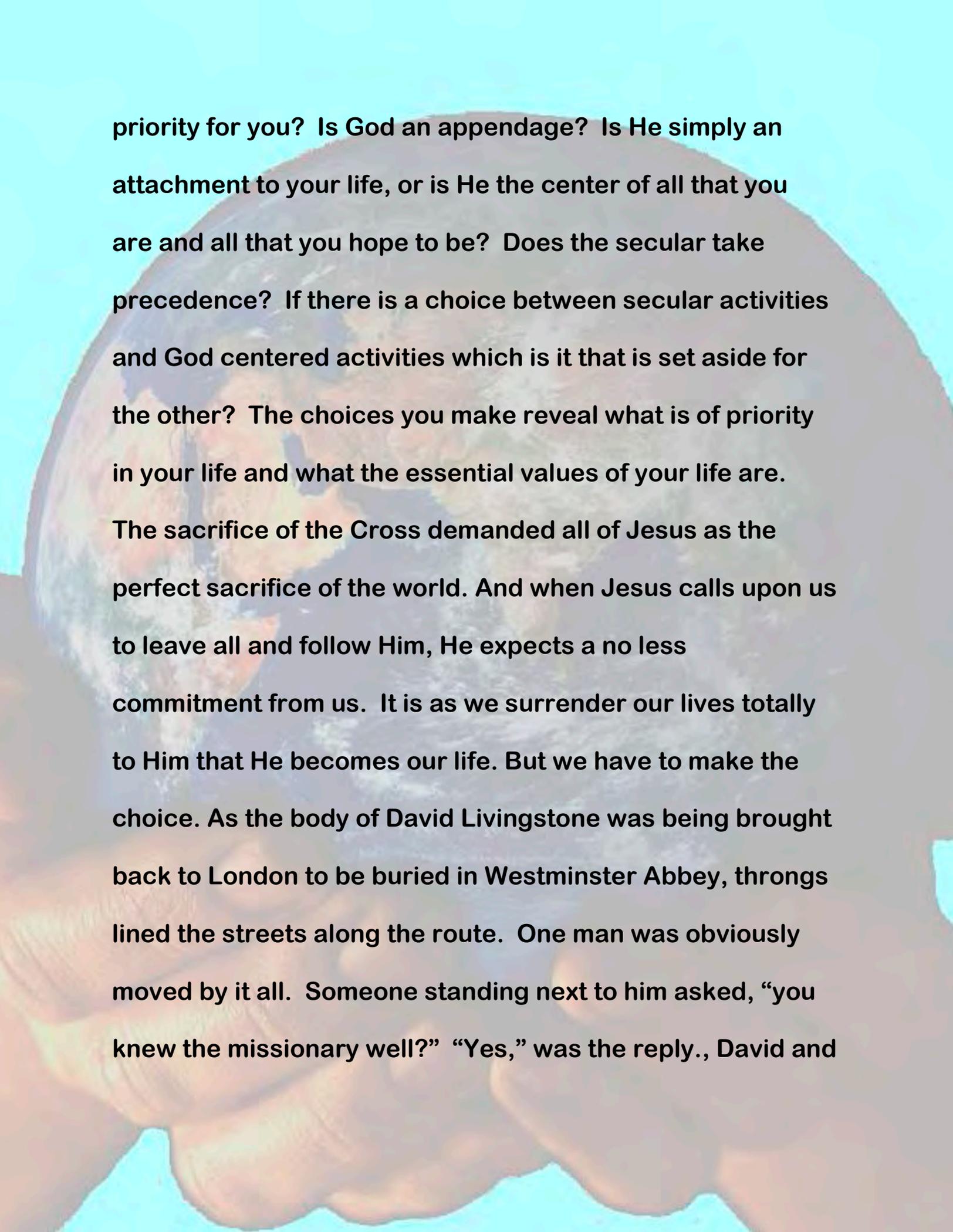
own father said to me as he was dying, “Son I am sick of being sick. I want to go to heaven.” He got his wish a few hours later as he went to be with his Lord. He possessed a sure and certain hope within him.” The truth is that the Christian has this hope within him. John Wesley was asked why the Methodist movement was so successful. He answered, “Our people die well” The child of God has nothing to fear when eternity looms large before him. George MacDonald maintained that “if we knew as much about heaven as God does, we would clap our hands every time a Christian dies.” The Scotsman gives the reason. While dying, was asked what he thought of death, he replied, “It matters little to me whether I live or die. If I die I will be with Jesus, and if I live Jesus will be with me.” Paul said it this way “for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain...” The genuine Christian can say this with assurance and certainty. Because there is this new certainty in the

heart of the Child of God there arises,

b. A New Expectancy. Philipians 1:21. “....To die is gain..” That is Paul’s expectancy. “I desire to depart and be with Christ.” The old spiritual puts it this way “This world is not my home, I’m just a passing through.” “What is all this stuff, a T.V. interviewer asked Malcolm Muggeridge shortly after he had come to know the Lord. What is all this stuff you have been talking about. That you do not belong to this world. Muggeridge smiled and said yes - That is exactly so. I do feel as though I do not belong here. I am having a wonderful time. It is not that life in this world is bad, it is just that to be with Christ is so much better.” This is a difficult truth for the world to understand and accept. Paul said “For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

Conclusion

If I were to ask you to complete the phrase “for too me to live is.....” How would you complete it? What is life’s

A faint background image of a globe with a hand holding it. The globe is centered in the upper half of the image, and a hand is visible at the bottom, appearing to hold the globe. The overall image has a soft, ethereal quality with a light blue and white color palette.

priority for you? Is God an appendage? Is He simply an attachment to your life, or is He the center of all that you are and all that you hope to be? Does the secular take precedence? If there is a choice between secular activities and God centered activities which is it that is set aside for the other? The choices you make reveal what is of priority in your life and what the essential values of your life are.

The sacrifice of the Cross demanded all of Jesus as the perfect sacrifice of the world. And when Jesus calls upon us to leave all and follow Him, He expects a no less commitment from us. It is as we surrender our lives totally to Him that He becomes our life. But we have to make the choice. As the body of David Livingstone was being brought back to London to be buried in Westminster Abbey, throngs lined the streets along the route. One man was obviously moved by it all. Someone standing next to him asked, “you knew the missionary well?” “Yes,” was the reply., David and

**I were boyhood friends. Later we went to Africa together.
David went for Africa's souls, and I went for Africa's gold.
And today I realize I concentrated on the wrong world. "
What world are you concentrating on?**

