

Jesus Is Everything To Me! The Glorious Truth of Philippians 1:21 Lived Out In The Life and Death of William Wallace

Philippians 1:21

Introduction: 1) William Wallace emerged from relative obscurity to become a national hero. A man of great courage and giftedness, he was tragically cut down in the prime of his life. His people mourned his death. Dedicated to what he believed in, he knowingly and willingly shunned a safer game plan and course of action that would have certainly extended his natural life. Arrested and brutally tortured, beaten and ridiculed, he would die alone with no words of comfort and no one to console him. Much like the apostle Paul in the cold, damp Mamertine dungeon in Rome, he died with no or few friends at his side (2 Tim. 4).

2) Now, you might find it odd and even out of place that I would dare to draw a comparison between William Wallace of Scotland and the Apostle Paul. But then I suspect you probably have the wrong William Wallace in mind, for I am not interested in that William Wallace, but William (Bill) Wallace the missionary, a man served the Chinese people for 16 years, only to be brutally murdered as a martyr for King Jesus by the Communist on February 10, 1951, less than 6 years before I was born.

3) When I think of “Bill Wallace of China” as he is affectionately known, Philippians 1:21 immediately comes to my mind. This is my life verse. Anytime I have the honor of putting my signature in a copy of the Bible, I will append this verse. It is my prayer for my life, my heart’s desire in my service for the Lord Jesus. As Paul says in the verse immediately preceding this text, my goal in life is that “Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death” (Phil. 1:20). Bill Wallace of China did both.

I. For Me To Live Is Christ.

- Bill Wallace was a Jesus-intoxicated man. For Bill to live was Christ. He proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ by word and deed, quietly and without much fanfare to be sure, but effectively without question.
- Bill Wallace was born in 1908, the son of a physician. Initially he had little interest in medicine, but loved things mechanical including cars and motorcycles. This was providential as it prepared him for a number of unique challenges on the mission field.
- At the age of 17, while working on a car in the family garage, a nagging question haunted him once again: “What should I do with my life? No, what would God have me do with my life? Simply, quietly, with a New Testament in his hand, the decisive decision was made: he would be a medical missionary. The date was July 5, 1925. He never looked back or wavered from this commitment.
- Wallace would spend the next 10 years receiving his education to become a doctor. He would turn down a lucrative offer of a medical practice in the states.
- As the time of his medical training drew to a close, a prayer was going up in the ancient China city of Wuchow. Dr. Robert Beddoe needed help at the Stout Memorial Hospital. Writing to the FMB he pled, “O God, give us a surgeon.” At almost the same time Bill Wallace was penning his own letter to the FMB. Listen to what he wrote.

My name is William L. Wallace and I am now serving as a resident in surgery at Knoxville General Hospital, Knoxville, Tennessee.

Since my senior year in high school, I have felt God would have me to be a medical missionary, and to that end I have been preparing myself. I attended the University of Tennessee for my premedical work and received the M.D. from the University Medical School in Memphis. I did an internship here at Knoxville General and remained for a surgical residency.

I am not sure what you desire by way of information, but I am single, twenty-six years old, and I am a member of the Broadway Baptist Church. My mother died when I was eleven and my father, also a physician, passed away two years ago. There were only two of us, and my sister, Ruth Lynn, is planning marriage.

I must confess, I am not a good speaker nor apt as a teacher, but I do feel God can use my training as a physician. As humbly as I know how, I want to volunteer to serve as a medical missionary under our Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

I have always thought of Africa, but I will go anywhere I am needed.

“On July 25, 1935, ten years to the month from the time he made his garage commitment and recorded it on the back leaf of his New Testament, Bill was appointed as a medical missionary to Wuchow, South China.”

For Bill Wallace, Jesus Christ was everything. Listen to what this quiet, shy man said to his home church, Broadway Baptist, on September 1, 1935, 5 weeks after his appointment and just prior to his leaving for China:

“I want to express to you my sincere and heartfelt appreciation in making it possible for me to go to China as your missionary, your ambassador for the Lord Jesus Christ ... You may ask why do I want to go to China ... and there spend my life and energy. You might say there is much to be done in this country and many have said you can do a lot of good here. Why should I go when there are such hardships and inconveniences? The only answer I have is that it is God’s plan that I go.

And God’s call was so definite to me. I think he made it definite for me so that there would be no doubt in my mind as to God’s plan. So that through the long years of preparation there would be no doubt that I was doing God’s will. That has been a comfort and joy to me and I have often thought, “If God can be for me who can be against me.”

I want to go because of the needs. And how great is that need! And China today is ready and willing to hear and accept the gospel of the Lord Jesus. In Luke 10:2 we read, “the harvest truly is great, ... pray ye therefore ... that he would send forth labourers into the harvest.” In our mission field today in China and in other countries, hundreds and thousands are going to their death without knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ because we do not have enough missionaries to tell the story.

I want to go to China because someone has prayed ... and God heard these prayers and has answered as he always does when God’s people pray. I would rather be going out as God’s missionary this morning than anything else in the world.

If there is one final word or request that I leave with you it is this— that you would pray for me, pray daily that this, your humble servant’s ministry and work might be all that God would have it to be.”

For me (Bill Wallace) to live (have life, purpose, meaningful existence) it is Christ. Bill Wallace was all about Jesus. This would effect a number of important decisions in his life. One quick example.

- Bill Wallace would never marry. In 1935 there was a young lady he took with him to Ridgecrest. Many expected them to marry. However, the young lady later said, “[Marriage] was out of the question. It would have been bigamy; Bill Wallace was already married to his work!”

II. To Die Is Gain.

- China was a boiling cauldron of political instability before Bill Wallace even arrived. However he was undeterred. Upon his initial arrival in Wuchow, he was informed that he would immediately have to return to Hong Kong because of the unrest. Bill simply and firmly said no. Informed that the captain was upset by his answer and could not be responsible for his safety Bill laughed and said, “Tell your captain to rest easy. He was not responsible for my coming here in the first place, and he doesn’t need to be responsible for my staying here!”
- Bill would love and serve the Chinese people for 15 years. His commitment kept him in China through a number of political uprisings, the Japanese invasion of China, World War II, and the Communist takeover of China. On more than a few occasions he would perform surgery with bombs exploding all around the

hospital. Dr. Wallace sent this following letter to his sister; Ruth Wallace Stegall, on September 17, 1938.

Dear Sister:

Our hospital, our school, and houses were bombed yesterday at 11 a.m.

One bomb hit right in middle of hospital and 3 on the side. We are all safe. None of the hospital employees killed. A few hurt. Hospital is full of wounded.

Don't worry. We are all safe. Don't have time to write more.

Don't worry.

William

At one point, he was forced to abandon Wuchow but kept the hospital going as he helped move it by boat up the river. This is where his mechanical expertise was especially helpful! Again and again he was urged to leave China but his response was steadfast, "I will stay as long as I am able to serve." And serve he did. Three examples.

- A small child died in his hospital. The parents came. Heart broken and grieving, he loved and ministered to them. He sat down with them and told them of Jesus and His love for the little children including their own. (p. 53).
- During his tenure Dr. Beddoe spoke of a revival that broke out in the hospital since Dr. Wallace's arrival. People were, he said, being healed and saved in Stout Memorial Hospital. He dated the beginning of the Spirit's movement with the arrival of Bill.

- Listen to the testimony about his love and ministry to the Chinese people: “It was while at Fok-Luk that I saw Dr. Wallace refuse his rice allowance and give it to a nurse who was desperately ill with fever. Most of us were sick with diarrhea or fever. Later on I saw him behind the cook tent we had rigged up. He was eating grains of burned rice, hardly palatable, that had been thrown away. When he realized I had seen him, he was terribly embarrassed.

No, he wasn't ashamed of eating that food. No one else would have had it, as hungry as we were. I think he was embarrassed because he did not want me to know how hungry he was.

He was so thin I thought he would blow away if a good wind came along. Somehow, however, he stayed well. He showed us how to eat the bones of what few fowl we found, to get needed vitamins. I believe his unorthodox methods saved all our lives during this period. He was so good, watching over each of us, cheering us, caring for the sick, and doing everything he could to provide for our comfort.

I don't want to offend you, Miss Wright, but we Chinese are not used to seeing Americans or Europeans do things like this. We know the missionaries love us, but there was always a difference. They lived their way and we lived ours, but Dr. Wallace didn't know about the difference. He was one of us. He accepted our portion-all of it.” (p. 137-38).

1) **What was said about Bill Wallace?**

- “If you want to find him, find the sickest patient in the hospital, and there he will be.” (95).

- “Bill Wallace was a doctor. His basic ministry was one of healing. But he was in China first of all as a bearer of the good news of Jesus Christ, the glad tidings of forgiveness and eternal life inherent in the old, old message of God’s love. Sometimes his soft, stuttering witness to that grace was more effective than the most eloquent evangelist’s plea.” (89).

- “With me, it’s different. I’m the one to stay. I’m just one piece of man without other responsibilities.” (Bill Wallace).

“One piece of man—it was an old Chinese saying used courteously to depreciate one’s value. It indicated a single, unencumbered, expendable person. By it, Bill meant his life was the only one at stake. He was the one thus seated by circumstances, prepared by God for this moment. He was the one to stay on in the face of the unknown, to give the Stout Memorial Hospital and the Baptist witness every chance to continue living, once the Red blight arrived.

I’m just one piece of man..., “Ed Galloway repeated the conversation to his wife as the ferry carried them to Hong Kong. He really meant it. He has no concept of his own worth and no anxiety for the future that I can see.” (177).

- By a Chinese believer concerning their beloved “Waa I Saang”: “He actually lived before us the life of Christ.”

2) **What was said by Bill Wallace?**

- “ I am more aware of my limitations than I have ever been. I guess my problem is that I have been imposing my limitations on God (69).
- On returning to China during World War II, “I’m not going back because I’m heroic. Actually, I’m a coward. But I want to go back because it’s where I’m supposed to be.” (98).
- “Every effort has been put forth to fulfill the mission of this hospital. The blind receive their sight and the halt and lame walk; the lepers are cleansed; the deaf hear and the poor have the gospel preached to them. It is our hope and prayer that the medical service in this institution shall be on that high plane befitting the glorious gospel which is preached daily within its walls.
- Following Pearl Harbor and America’s entrance into World War II, “We’ll do what God wants us to do. It doesn’t make any difference what happens to us. The only important thing is that when it does happen, we be found doing the will of God.” (113).

3) **The superlative servant of the Savior goes home to His Lord.**

- John Piper tells the story of two elderly women, medical missionaries, who died on the mission field serving the Lord Jesus. His pastoral evaluation and assessment is sobering.

“As many of you know, Ruby Eliason and Laura Edwards dies this week in Cameroon in a car accident – Ruby in her eighties and Laura in her seventies. Ruby gave all her life in medical missions among the poor. Laura, a doctor who practiced in India for many years and then here in

the [Twin] Cities, was giving her retirement for the bodies and the souls of the poor in Cameroon. Both died suddenly when their car went over a cliff. Was that a tragedy? Well, in one sense all death is tragic. But consider this. Ruby Eliason and Laura Edwards, at their age, could have been taking it easy here in retirement. Think of tens of thousands of retired people spending their lives in one aimless leisure after another – that is a tragedy. The fact that Jesus Christ took authority to make Ruby Eliason and Laura Edwards valiant for love and truth among the poor and lost and diseased of Cameroon when most Americans are playing their way into eternity – that is not a tragedy. And that he took them suddenly to heaven in their old age in the very moment of their love and service and sacrifice, and without long, drawn-out illnesses and without protracted and oppressive feelings of uselessness – that is not a tragedy. Rather, I say, “Give me that death, O Jesus Christ, Lord of the universe, give me that life and that ministry and that death!”

- The death of another medical missionary is of a similar, but not identical nature. On December 18, 1950, Bill Wallace completed an exhaustive day at Stout Memorial. Communist activities had been on the increase and many missionaries had been evacuated from their field assignment. Bill Wallace chose to stay and serve. Early December 19, before dawn, Chinese Communist lied their way into the clinic grounds of the hospital. Chinese soldiers order Bill Wallace and other workers out of their bedrooms and led them to the hospital proper. Immediately the

soldiers began to accuse Dr. Wallace of being an American spy in an attempt to discredit him before the Chinese people who so deeply loved and respected him. Calmly and clearly Bill Wallace responded to their accusations by saying, "We are what we seem to be. We are doctors and nurses and hospital staff engaged in healing the suffering and sick in the name of Jesus Christ. We are here for no other reason." The soldiers went to Bill's room and returned with a small handgun. There is no question it had been planted after Bill was forced to leave his bedroom. There is no historical evidence that Bill ever owned or shot a gun in his life. However, the Communist had what they wanted. He was arrested and his nurse assistant Everley Hayes placed under house arrest. What follows is the sad and courageous account of Bill's final days from biographer Jesse Fletcher:

Faced with wild charges of espionage, Bill was placed in a cell and left alone for some time. He was able to receive meals from the hospital and had an opportunity to tell his jailer of Jesus Christ and to preach from a cell window to two or three peasants who gathered to hear him.

A week after his arrest, the Communists turned away the man who brought Bill's food one morning. They said he would no longer be able to receive it. That night a called meeting was held at one of the big town halls in Wuchow and all citizens of any importance were commanded to attend. There the man who had arrested the doctor arose to inform the crowd that Dr. William Wallace of the Stout Memorial Hospital had

confessed to being a spy. They spoke of the gun and hinted at dark deeds the doctor had done. They asked for those who had any accusation against Dr. Wallace to come forward with their charges. None came.

Discrediting the Doctor

What the Communists had secured from Bill was a statement concerning his name, age, length of service in China, and other factual matters.

Reading it and realizing it was all true, he signed it. The Communists then typed into a blank part of the paper the statement that he had been sent to China as a secret service man by the United States Government. This was the confession.

The next day, Bill was awakened early and shoved out into a courtyard where he realized for the first time he was not the only missionary being held. He recognized a Catholic sister and a bishop.

A placard with obscene and derisive accusations and charges was placed over him, and his hands were tied behind his back. With others, he was marched through the streets to the Fu River and across to the main prison halfway up the hill—that same hill to which he had gone so many times before for fellowship with his friends, the Christian and Missionary Alliance people. On the way over, shoved by a guard, he fell and badly hurt a hand that he threw out to break his fall. He received no care.

Daily, sometimes hourly, often through the night at the prison, he was awakened and brought to an interrogator's room. The world had yet to hear of brainwashing, which was to be more fully publicized after the release of the prisoner of the Korean War, but Bill Wallace began to experience it the second week of his imprisonment.

Their accusations, viciously and vehemently proclaimed, bewildered and upset him. They were shouted over and over again, growing in intensity, growing in degradation, allowing for no defense. No excuses or answers were permitted. It overwhelmed him to hear accusations of incompetence in surgery, of murdering and maiming Chinese patients, of performing illegal and obscene operations. His interrogators hinted that doctors from all over China had gathered evidence on him and were demanding his punishment. When exhausted, he was returned to the cell—a bare room with a thin pallet for protection from the damp and cold and filth of the floor.

On another day, all the foreign prisoners were gathered into an open courtyard and one by one forced to stand by a table piled high with guns, bullets, opium, radios, and other items supposed to have been confiscated in the raids in which they were arrested. Then each one was photographed behind the table. When it came Bill's turn to step up to the table, he was almost pushed into it by the guard behind him. Rudely, he was posed, with great stress being put upon his holding the aerial of a radio—to prove the spying charges.

It was obvious to the Catholic missionaries who were in prison with Bill and who were later released, that he was shaken and strained by the ordeal of interrogation. The rest of that day the prisoners were sport for a large crowd of Communist soldiers, men and women, and they suffered numerous brutalities. Toward the end of the day, one of the missionaries found an opportunity to inquire of Bill how he was holding out. With a tender smile, he replied, "All right, trusting in the Lord."

The Battle for Sanity

From his cell in the night, Bill sometimes cried out in agony after the battle was over. With pieces of paper and a smuggled pencil, he wrote short affirmations to try to keep his mind centered on things that he could anchor himself to. Some were Scripture passages, others simple denials of guilt, protests of innocence. He stuck these on the walls of his barren room and repeated them to himself in an effort to prepare for the next interrogation.

But each one came like a high wave. At times, he was all but overwhelmed by the interrogation. Delirium, crying, and blank periods came, but he fought on—clinging to his faith. His fellow victims, not yet subjected to the intensive brainwashing, helplessly watched this inhuman assault on one of the greatest men they had ever known.

Frantically, they tried to reach him from time to time by calling through their cells. But it was a lonely battle which only Bill and the Lord—who

loved him and who, somehow, in his wildest delirium he affirmed—
could face.

Then something went wrong. The Communists plainly intended to brainwash their victim into an open confession, to have him repudiate publicly all that he was and all he had stood for. They thought their goal was within reach, but the tough spirit would not capitulate so easily, and his protests rang through the night.

The guards, driven by fear or perhaps guilt, came to his cell in the night with long poles and cruelly thrust them between the cell bars to jab the doctor into unconsciousness. Somebody figured wrong. For that one night the battle came to an end, and, though no one heard Bill Wallace cry, “It is finished,” he offered up his spirit and brought his ministry and mission to a close. Quietly, his soul slipped from his torn body and his exhausted mind and went to be with the One he had so faithfully and resolutely served.

Bill Wallace was dead to the world, but alive forever with God.

The next morning the guards ran down the cellblock, crying that the doctor had hanged himself. Asking the two Catholic fathers imprisoned in the cell to come with them, they went into the cell where the body of the doctor was hanging from a beam by a rope of braided quilt. The guards tried to get the fathers to sign a statement that he had committed suicide. They would not do so.

Back at the hospital where the staff had waited prayerfully through all these weeks, word came to go and get the body of Dr. Wallace. Everley went with her servant and another nurse. They would not let her go into the cell, but they let the servant in, and Everley instructed him quietly to be sure to note the characteristics of the body. The facial characteristics of hanging were missing—bulging eyes, discolored face, swollen tongue. Instead, the upper torso was horribly bruised.

A cheap wooden coffin had been brought, and as soon as the body was dressed, it was put into the coffin and nailed shut by the Communist soldiers. Bill Wallace was dead. He was just 43 years old.

Conclusion:

- Bill Wallace died on February 10, 1951. Those who worked close beside him were not allowed to see his body as the Communist attempted to hide their brutal torture of this precious servant to the Chinese people and King Jesus. Our nation was outraged, and God's people wept all over the world. Immediately testimonies to this faithful missionary began to pop up.

- A letter from Dr. Theron Rankin, head (executive secretary) of the then FMB.

When God chooses someone to make a superlative witness of His love, He chooses a superlative child of His. He chose His own Son, Jesus, to make the witness on the Cross. And now it seems that He chose Bill to make this witness. To give his life in love and service for the people whom he served fits in naturally and harmoniously with Bill's life. The two things go together because he was that kind of man. His life's service among men bears out the testimony of his death.

Bill's death was not the result of his being caught by a situation from which he could not escape. He deliberately chose his course with a committal that made him ready to take any consequences that might come.

- From Dr. Baker James Cauthen, at the time Dr. Wallace's regional leader.

Many things about the death of Bill Wallace make us think of the death of the Christ. The authorities were envious of his place in the hearts of people. They used falsehood in order to bring charges against him. They tried to represent him as an agent of the American Government, as the Jews tried to represent Jesus as one stirring up revolt against Rome. They sought to stir up public sentiment by calling large groups of people together. They subjected him to a bitter and cruel imprisonment.

Just as in the case of Jesus the enemies of the truth sought to discredit His testimony by declaring the disciples had come and stolen away His body, so in Wuchow the Communists stated that Dr. Wallace had died by strangling himself.

This nobody believes even a moment.

- By God's grace the life of this servant of the Lord Jesus has not been forgotten.

There is a wonderful biography by Jesse Fletcher entitled *Bill Wallace of China*. A motion picture based on the book was produced. In Puchan, Korea there is the Wallace Memorial Hospital. The Baptist Student Union at the University of Tennessee Medical Center is named for Bill Wallace. In Knoxville there is also the vibrant and growing Wallace Memorial Baptist Church. However, the real memorial to this man is not in buildings, but in the hundreds of men and women who have been inspired by his life to go to the nations as missionaries for our Lord.

- On January 12, 1985 a service was held at the Wallace Memorial Baptist Church as the remains of William Lindsey Wallace were returned and laid to rest in the place where he grew up. In that service Dr. James McCluskey powerfully noted:

“I cannot imagine that this congregation of believers called Wallace Memorial Baptist Church, would today have the same missions concern, outreach, love, fellowship, and joy if it was known by any other name than Wallace Memorial. I know that the remains of William Lindsey Wallace live on in my own life, motivating and challenging me after these more than twenty-five years as pastor of this church named in his memory.

The remains of William Lindsey Wallace are going to Costa Rica tomorrow in the life and ministry of Patricia Stooksbury as she returns there to continue her missionary service. Pat felt God’s call to missions and responded to that call in the missionary environment of a church called Wallace Memorial.

The remains of William Lindsey Wallace are in Grenada, West Indies today as Charlotte and Carter Davis serve there. They experienced a call and response to serve in a spirit of missions concern cultivated in this church.

The remains of William Lindsey Wallace are in Ecuador today where Dale Maddox is completing his second year as a missionary journeyman. His missions experience came as a member of youth missions team sent out by Wallace Memorial Baptist Church.

The remains of William Lindsey Wallace are in the lives of more than twenty-five young people of this church who are today either serving or preparing to serve in church related vocations and in the lives of thousands of others who have been

inspired and led by his life. The remains of William Lindsey Wallace are scattered today into the uttermost parts of the earth where missionaries give witness that Jesus Christ is Lord.” (Fletcher, 252-53).

- There was no funeral service for Bill Wallace. The government officials would not allow it. A grave was dug, and a nailed shut coffin was lowered into the ground. The soldiers stayed until the burial was complete and then they drove everyone away from this lonely, unmarked grave. However, it did not stay unmarked. Despite danger to themselves, friends of the kind, brave doctor collected funds for a marker and lovingly built a small monument over the solitary grave. Inscribed were 7 single words that accurately captured this superlative servant of our Savior: “For to me to live is Christ.” And we know the rest of the story: “To die is gain.”