

Righteous in Christ

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Preacher: Rev. Jonathan St. Clair

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristchurchEastBay.org. Hello, I'm John and I'm in the youth group and also the Alameda community group here at Christchurch.

So today's reading is from Paul's letter to the Philippians, chapter 1, verses 1 to 2, and then also chapter 3, verses 1 to 14.

Yeah. Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and the deacons, grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. It is no trouble for me to write the same thing to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh.

[1 : 18] For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh. Though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more. Circumcision on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews.

In regard to the law, a Pharisee. As for zeal, persecuting the church. As for righteousness, based on the law, faultless.

But whatever were gains, to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.

I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him. Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ.

[2 : 22] The righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ, yes. To know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings.

Becoming like him in his death. And so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal.

But I press on and take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it.

But one thing I do. Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead. I press on toward the goal to win the prize of which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Good morning, Christ Church. I want to thank you for many of you who have so warmly welcomed me back.

- [3 : 22] We were traveling as a family to all kind of places in June. New York City, Washington, D.C., North Carolina, Atlanta, Georgia.
- Visiting for two family weddings, college trips for my daughter. Our family got to see the nation's capital for the first time. And it was an amazing trip. But I'm really glad to be back here with my Christ Church family.
- And I was reminded that there are many great churches out there. But this one is the best. And so, you know, back in May, we started preaching the Apostle Paul.
- And to do that, we began to look at this amazing book in the New Testament called The Acts of the Apostles. And we turned and we looked at one of the places, one of the three places that Paul talks about his whole life transformation.
- And we looked in Acts chapter 9 where Saul of Tarsus became the Apostle Paul by encountering Jesus. Right? Jesus whose people Paul was persecuting.
- [4 : 34] And on that Damascus road, Paul was, he was absolutely transformed. Not only into a Christian, not only into a follower of Jesus, but into a messenger.
- Into somebody that would go out and spread the gospel and begin to plant churches all over the Roman Empire. And Paul would go on to write 13 of the letters that we have in the New Testament.
- And then we looked not just at Paul's transformation, but the transformation that began to happen through Paul. In Acts chapter 16, we saw how the Lord called Paul further and further away from ground zero.
- And he called Paul deeper and deeper into Greco-Roman pagan territory where people had never heard the name of Jesus. And Paul went and began to spread the message of Jesus.
- And one of the first cities that he entered in, when he went to Greece, when he went onto European soil for the first time, one of the first cities he went into was Philippi.
- [5 : 37] And maybe you remember that story how Paul went there and he encountered in that city a woman named Lydia. She was a successful businesswoman. And she was converted when she heard the gospel truth.
- And then Paul encountered this other woman. And she was this enslaved girl. And she was converted when she encountered gospel power. And then there was that jailer.
- When Paul was thrown in jail with his friend Silas, there was that city jailer. And he was converted when he saw gospel life in Jesus' people and how they were living. And we're told there that in the city of Philippi, these three people plus their friends and family members that they shared the gospel with, they were baptized as the first members of that church plant in the city of Philippi.
- Well, having started that church in around 52 AD, fast forward a little bit to 60, 61, 62 AD, Paul is writing this letter of affection, this letter of friendship.
- And he's writing it from a prison cell to this church in Philippi. And I want to encourage you as we open it up this morning that I think there's something here for everyone.
- [6 : 54] If you are here and you do not identify as a Christian, but you're exploring Christianity, this is an amazing opportunity for you to engage with the primary sources, to encounter for yourself what the greatest Christian theologian has to say to this multicultural church in this Greco-Roman city of Philippi.
- And if you are a Christian, you're probably aware that the text that John just read for us, Philippians chapter 3, is considered by most people to be one of Paul's greatest passages.

And that's why we're going to look at it not just today. We're going to look up to verse 9 today, and then next week we're going to look at it again. From verse 10 and following. But what I want to suggest to you is that Paul is, he's posing three questions in this text.

Paul is asking us, where is your joy and your confidence? That's question number one. Where is your joy and your confidence? And the second question he's asking us is, what radically redefines our values?

What radically redefines our values? And then the third question is, what are the implications of living by faith? If you're going to live by faith, what are the implications of living by faith?

[8 : 19] So let's just explore each of these for a moment. Where is your joy and your confidence? That's the first question. Where is your joy and your confidence? Look at what Paul says in verse 1. He says, further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord.

And Paul exhorts the church to ask themselves the question, what is the source of our joy? What is the source of our rejoicing? Right? Like how would you fill in the blank?

If we said rejoice in blank, what would go in that blank? And some of us might say, well, I rejoice in my summer vacation. I rejoice in my career success.

I rejoice in this romantic relationship. I rejoice in the well-being of my kids. I rejoice in my bank account and my 401k. And these are all really, really good things.

But Paul is telling us there's something of greater worth. And what is that? He says, well, rejoice most deeply, rejoice in the Lord. That's what should go in that blank.

[9 : 22] Rejoice in the resurrected and living Lord Jesus. Paul says, make him your source of deepest joy. Let him be the one that causes you to sing and to pray with joy.

To love other people with joy. To work hard at your job with joy. And what compels Paul to say this to the church? To rejoice in the Lord.

Well, because there are these false teachers. False teachers who are seeking to pull the church to rejoice in something else. And what is that something else that we're being invited to rejoice in?

Well, Paul says in verse 2, he says, watch out for those dogs. And in the Greek, again, it says, watch out for those evildoers. And then again, it says, watch out for those mutilators of the flesh.

For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by the Spirit, we boast, who boast in Christ Jesus. And who put no confidence in the flesh. Though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

[10 : 20] If others think they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more. So did you hear what Paul is saying there? He says confidence, confidence, confidence. Three times. These false teachers are influencing the church to put their confidence, to put their trust in, well, not in the Lord Jesus.

But to put their confidence rather in their own flesh. To make that the source of their joy. To put their confidence and to take pride in themselves.

To boast in their own resume and their own righteousness. And this is such a serious danger that Paul uses the strongest language possible.

And in the Greek, again, he says three times, watch out, watch out, watch out. Even as he says confidence, confidence, confidence. And hopefully he's getting our attention and prompting us to ask the question, what is my source of joy and confidence before God?

How might I be putting confidence in myself and in my flesh? Because these false teachers are trying to convince the church that, look, if you want to be confident in your relationship with God, if you want to be confident that you belong to God and belong to the people of God, if you want to be confident that your faith is real, and you want to be confident that you are a genuine child of God, and you want to be confident that you are an authentic servant of God, then you need to look at your own performance.

[11 : 55] You need to look at your own righteousness. You need to look at how well are you living out the laws that God has commanded in his word. These false teachers, they've come into this church that's predominantly full of Gentiles, former pagans from all over the empire.

They're basically Greek and Turkish. They're Egyptian. They're Ethiopian. They're German. They're Persian. They've come from everywhere. They're all different kinds of cultures, races, ethnicities, languages.

And these teachers are saying to them, look, if you are not circumcised, if you are not eating kosher foods, if you are not practicing the Sabbath to the fullest degree, if you're not following the rituals and holy days that we find in the law of Moses, if you're basically a Gentile but not living Jewish, then how can you really be confident before God?

And Paul says, okay, to these false teachers, he says, okay, if you want to play the confidence in the flesh game, I'll play it with you.

And he says, not only can I match you with confidence in the flesh, but I can outrun you and beat you every time. And here's what he says in verse 4. He says, if others think they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more.

[13 : 19] Now this is a list of seven items, and you're probably aware that seven is the biblical number for wholeness and completion and perfection.

And in this list, the first half of the list, Paul gives us his inherited privileges and all of his orthodox upbringing and his amazing pedigree. And in the second half of the list, he gives us all of his personal successes, all the achievements that he has performed both religiously and morally.

And he says, these were my grounds for confidence in the flesh, confidence before God. He says, look, I was circumcised on the eighth day according to God's law.

I received that sacrament of initiation. I received that symbol of God's covenant with Abraham, and I received it within the first week of my life. And then he goes on, he says, look, out of all the great mass of humanity and out of all the many people in the race of Israel, God chose to put me in the tribe of Benjamin.

Benjamin was Jacob's youngest son. He was the only son to be born inside the promised land. It says in Deuteronomy 33 that Benjamin is the beloved of the Lord.

[14 : 51] It's from the tribe of Benjamin that the first king of Israel came. If you looked at the boundaries of the tribe of Benjamin, you would find this holy city of Jerusalem and the holy temple itself.

This one tribe, along with the tribe of Judah, they were the only people to be true to God's covenant with the line and the house and the throne of King David. Paul says, I'm not only from the right race, I'm from the right tribe.

And then he goes on, he says, I'm a Hebrew son of Hebrew parents because, you know, there's all these Hellenistic Jews who speak Greek and they've basically been assimilated into Greek culture, but not me.

My Hebrew parents made sure that my mother tongue is Hebrew and that we maintained our distinctive Hebrew way of life among the pagans. And having described his orthodox pedigree and upbringing, he now focuses us on the second half of his list on all of his achievements.

He says, look, I was part of the most scholarly group of Hebrews. I was a Pharisee. Pharisees take the authority and the inspiration of the Bible incredibly seriously.

[16 : 04] They study God's revelation day and night. They're scrupulous about living out God's commandments and walking in the way of holiness. That was me. He says, as a measure of my great zeal for God and my fervent devotion to his word, I took action against anything that would dilute or distort or derail Israel's faith.

And so, therefore, I persecuted the church, this little group of people who said that a crucified man was Israel's Messiah and the world's Lord. He said, I basically stamped that out.

And finally, Paul says, as the culmination and the climax of these achievements that give me confidence in my flesh, he says, as for my righteousness, as for my right relationship with God and my right relationship with other people, he says, I was outwardly obedient to God's specific ritual and moral requirements.

And my record was absolutely flawless. You can go ask anybody. I was completely blameless. Now, if LinkedIn had existed in Paul's day, he would have had the most incredible resume you could imagine.

And what would a modern resume like this sound like, a modern kind of confidence in the flesh list sound like? I think it would sound a little bit maybe like this.

[17 : 33] If anyone thinks they have reason to put confidence in their righteousness, I have more. I was born in the United States of America. To hardworking parents, my first words were personal responsibility.

I grew up in a multicultural environment. I was educated at elite universities. My peers and my mentors are published in The New Yorker and Nature Magazine.

I work for a Nobel Prize winner. I advocate for the oppressed and for the marginalized. I regularly volunteer to serve the poor. I shop local.

I recycle and compost. I only ride a bike. I have not used a plastic straw since 2018. I always vote, donate, march, and I post about it all on social media.

My family and my friends say that I'm authentic, that I'm trustworthy, that I'm empathetic and creative and passionate. I start my day in prayer. I tithe off the gross of my income.

[18 : 40] I serve my church regularly. It's an impressive list. An impressive list of identity markers, of cultural symbols, of personal credentials.

And Paul has it all. In fact, there's another guy in the New Testament, very much like Paul. His name is Nicodemus. He was a Pharisee like Paul. He had the exact same resume, basically, as Paul.

And when Jesus entered into a dialogue with Nicodemus, in the Gospel of John, chapter 3, Jesus said to Nicodemus, he said, to this man who had great confidence in his flesh, he said, you cannot enter into the kingdom of God with the resume that you have.

You have to be born again from above. You have to be born again of the Spirit of God. He says to Nicodemus, you cannot rely on all those identity markers of your resume, your birth, your country, your race, your language, your upbringing.

You can't rely on your gender. You can't rely on your sexuality. You can't rely on your financial status. You cannot rely on your social power. You can't rely on your intellect and your understanding.

[19 : 59] You cannot rely on your zeal, or your sincerity, or all of your goodness. Jesus said to him, you must be reborn. You have to be regenerated.

Something has to happen where the life of God comes into your soul, and you become a new creation. Nicodemus, it's not just that you need to have something added on to you, a new thing in your impressive resume just tacked on at the end.

It's not that you need to be modified here, or changed a little bit over there. He says, you need to become a new creation. None of your confidence in the flesh is going to enable you to see the kingdom of God or to enter into the kingdom of God.

That's very much what Paul is teaching us in Philippians 3. He's asking us, where exactly is your joy, and where exactly is your confidence?

Is it in your flesh and in yourself, or is it in something else? And then Paul goes on. Here's the second question. What radically redefines your values?

[21 : 14] What radically redefines what you value? And Paul says this in verse 7. Verse 7. After his confidence in the flesh list, he says, but whatever were gains to me, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

You see, Paul's thinking about the life that he had before his encounter with the resurrected and living Lord Jesus on that road to Damascus. And he's using the language of economics.

He's using the language of the marketplace and of accounting, of losses and gains, of credits and debits. And he says, look, all of my privileges that I inherited, all the achievements that I accomplished, they used to be for me on the gain side of the ledger.

That is where I found all of my confidence. But then he says in verse 8, he says, what is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.

I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ. Now maybe you remember back in Acts chapter 9, on the road to Damascus, Paul sees that brilliant and blinding light and he hears that commanding and probing voice and Paul says, who are you Lord?

[22 : 32] And the answer he gets back is, I am Jesus. Now not all conversions are that dramatic, okay? But they all have the same effect that Paul is describing here.

And what he says is, the moment I discovered something, the moment I discovered someone of such surpassing worth, such incalculable value, that someone completely revised my balance sheet.

He says, that moment that I met King Jesus raised from the dead, he totally reversed all of my gains into loss.

He says, what I discovered, that precious and beautiful treasure that I discovered in Jesus, he says, when I compare that to the best that this world has to offer me, it all amounts to a loss.

In fact, he gets even more intense than that. He says, the relative value of all else in relationship to Jesus is, in the Greek, it's skubula.

[23 : 43] It's garbage. Paul says, it's refuge. It's excrement. It's foul-smelling, revolting filth.

What makes Jesus, the eternally beloved Son of God the Father, so great, so valuable, so precious, that everything else, in comparison with him, Paul calls abhorrent garbage.

Well, Paul gives us the answer in verse 9, when he's talking about two different kinds of righteousness. What are the two different kinds of righteousness?

He says in verse 9, I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

You see, this first kind of righteousness, he says, it's righteousness, quote unquote, of my own. It's about who I am. It's about what I have. It's about what I do and how I perform and that gives me confidence in the flesh, that causes me to rejoice in myself and boast in my position and my accomplishments.

[25 : 02] And he says, this first kind of righteousness compared to the second kind is dramatically inferior and it's woefully insufficient to give you the confidence you need before God.

But he says, look at this second kind of righteousness. The second kind of righteousness, he says, it comes not, it's not of my own, it comes from God. It's a righteousness that's in Christ.

And compared to that first kind of righteousness, this righteousness is infinitely superior and it's wonderfully sufficient to save us, to put us into a reconciled and a right relationship with God.

You see, none of us, had we tried our absolute hardest could have produced a greater righteousness of my own than that which the Apostle Paul accomplished.

I mean, he's a truly impressive person. But, Paul says, when he compares what he did, when he compares the righteousness of my own with the righteousness that God has provided for us in Jesus Christ, he says, it amounts to a pile of something I cannot say in church.

[26 : 23] Scubala. Garbage. Excrement. That's what my own righteousness is worth. See, the wonder and the beauty of this God-given righteousness is that it comes not from inside of us, but it comes from outside of us.

righteousness. It's a righteousness that's not waiting to be lived out perfectly and consistently by us, but it's a righteousness that has, in fact, already been lived out perfectly and faithfully in the life of someone better than us.

Right? It's been secured by the obedience of Jesus who righteously obeyed God his whole life all the way to and through his obedience to God on the cross.

And friends, what Paul is saying here is that you can spend your whole life searching high and searching low and you are never going to find a better righteousness in all the philosophies, in all the systems of life, in all the religions of the world than the righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ.

You see, if you sit down and you read the Gospels and you see the way that Jesus is healing the sick, the way he's feeding the hungry, forgiving people who just royally screwed up, the way he's raising up the poor and welcoming the marginalized and liberating the oppressed, when you see Jesus showing and telling people how to really be truly human, right, how to love and worship and pray to God with all your heart, how to give yourself in love for your neighbor, for other people.

[28 : 12] Jesus shows people how to do that by giving up his body to death, right, putting himself in the place of sinners on the cross. When you see that, when you see the righteousness that God has provided for us in Jesus Christ, it's so surpassingly more worthy, it's so incomparably more valuable than any righteousness, not only that any of us could have achieved or performed, but of all of our righteousness put together.

So the robe of righteousness that God has provided for us in Jesus makes all the righteousness that we are trying to weave around ourselves look like tattered and pitiful rags.

And this is why Paul says that all the ways that I put confidence in my flesh, my birth, my upbringing, my country, my race, my intellect, my understanding, my zeal, my goodness, it's scubala.

It's just rank and rancid garbage in comparison with what God has provided in Christ. He says, everything the world could offer me, whatever advantages or status or benefits or honors or comforts that might possibly come my way in the future and that I might put my confidence in, he says, it's scubala.

It's revolting refuse compared to gaining Jesus personally and knowing Jesus relationally and being found in Jesus positionally before God because Paul says when I have Christ, his resume is now my resume.

[29 : 51] His portfolio is my portfolio and that's why Paul defines a Christian in verse 3. He says, a Christian is someone who puts no confidence in the flesh but rather they boast in Jesus Christ.

That's what a Christian is. So where's your joy and your confidence? What radically redefines your values? And the last question briefly is, what are the implications of living by faith?

What are the implications of living by faith? So just to review, what does it cost God to provide this righteousness for us? Will it cost Him everything? It cost Him the life and death of His beloved Son?

He's done everything that's needed for our righteousness. And what does it cost us to receive this righteousness? Well, it costs us nothing. It's a free gift of God's grace.

All we need is our need. All we need is what Paul calls faith in Christ. Just to have open and empty hands by faith to receive righteousness from Jesus with gratitude.

[30 : 58] Just to by faith allow God to put the robe of Christ's righteousness on us. Here's the question. What are the implications? What are the consequences for receiving God's free grace?

If by faith I take hold of the righteousness that God has provided for me, what will happen to my life? And the answer is, it will cost you the loss of all things.

That's what Paul says in verse 8. He says, he talks about the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus my Lord for whose sake I have lost all things. What does Paul mean?

What is the loss that comes to him from putting his faith in Jesus Christ? Well, let me just see if I can draw this out for you as we close. What Paul is saying here is he's saying Jesus is surpassingly great and worthy and valuable in himself no matter what anyone thinks about him.

He just is that. He's great. But Paul says it's not enough to just stand back and to marvel at the objective beauty and excellencies of Jesus.

[32 : 12] Paul says what we need to do is enter into a subjective knowing of Jesus not as the Lord but as what Paul calls him my Lord. Jesus has to become for you my Lord who loved me and gave himself for me.

This critical and essential move from objective knowledge about Jesus to subjective knowing of Jesus what Paul is telling us is that when you make that move you're going to lose things that are extremely valuable to you.

Think about what the Apostle Paul lost. By placing his faith in Jesus there on that Damascus road he lost all of his former sources of identity and belonging and meaning and purpose.

He lost his social status his reputation and his standing before his community. Paul lost many many of his cherished relationships.

He lost financial support. He lost his personal comfort and security. He's writing this letter from jail and a few years he's going to lose his head. What Paul is saying here is if you put your faith in Jesus you're going to lose something that's really really valuable to you.

[33 : 32] For us that probably means your independence your autonomy you no longer if Jesus is my Lord you no longer belong to yourself you're no longer your Lord you have a Lord that you have to listen to and follow and obey and surrender to and submit to you're going to lose your independence and your autonomy but what Paul is saying is that these losses actually will not feel like losses to you.

I was reading in my Bible reading plan earlier this week and it took me to Jesus' parables in Matthew 13 and here's what Jesus says he says Jesus is telling us about people whose lives were changed by the joy of discovering an object of such surpassing value a new precious reality that was there for the taking and they didn't just stand back and say wow that is objectively a hidden treasure that is objectively a pearl of great price no they subjectively renounced everything that they had they subjectively sold absolutely everything they had to go get the thing of great value and that's what Paul means when he says for Jesus sake

I've lost all things but when he says that he doesn't think that he's made any sacrifice at all Paul says I really haven't lost anything in fact everything I've gotten through Jesus has been a gain to me Paul would write in Colossians 2:3 he says when I discovered Jesus when I discovered the king of God's kingdom I found the one in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge and Jesus has consistently down the last 2,000 years been moving men and women into large life changing decisions that may seem to other people like great hacks of renunciation but for Paul and for me and maybe for you knowing Jesus personally and relationally knowing Jesus intimately and experientially as my

Lord who loved me and who gave himself for me that so far surpasses all other things that losing all to get him is actually a gain and what you'll find is that you actually get back everything that you thought you lost your identity your belonging your meaning your purpose your relationships your freedom everything comes back to you in Jesus friends it's only as you look upon the treasure of who Jesus is that pearl of great price that you too will be carried away by joy and by the power of God's free grace to go sell absolutely everything you have to get it and to say with Paul I have lost all things for the sake of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus as my

Lord let's take a moment to just reflect on that as we come to the table of our king in the name of the Father Son and Holy Spirit Amen