

Philippians 3:1–11

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[0 : 0 0] finally my brothers rejoice in the lord to write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you look out for the dogs look out for the evil doers look out for those who mutilate to flesh for we are the circumcision who worship by the spirit of god and glory in christ and put no confidence in the flesh though i myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also if anyone thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh i have more circumcised on the eighth day of the people of israel of the tribe of benjamin a hebrew of hebrews as to the law a pharisee as to zeal a persecutor of the church as to righteousness under the law blameless but whatever gain i had i counted as loss for the sake of christ indeed i count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing christ jesus my lord for his sake i have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order 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 comes through faith in christ the righteousness from god that depends on faith that i may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share his sufferings becoming like him in his death that by any means possible i may attain the resurrection from the dead this is the word of the lord thanks be to god so well if you're visiting this morning let me rush to say hello thank you for choosing to spend your sunday morning with us i hope the end of the service uh many will rush to greet you and you will sense um so warm welcome but as we get started i encourage let's just pause and turn to the lord and ask for his help father we we come to your word and we ask for your help that your word is a lamp into our feet and the light into our path and so would you illumine these next moments before us may you show us your son may he extend his hand to save and may we be strengthened as we look to you help us to this end we pray we ask these things for jesus sake amen growing up i had few privileged opportunities to travel abroad usually accompanying my dad on his academic conferences i routinely recall one of the first obligations we had to do in arriving in a new country after retrieving our luggage from baggage claim we would proceed to a booth at the airport that read currency exchange it would be there we would exchange the u.s dollar to the local currency and this was certainly necessary and essential because without local currency uh riding to the taxi to the hotel would be not possible acquiring food at the local market would not be possible paying for our meal at the

local dining establishment would not be possible you see the dollar was not a legitimate form of currency i know these days with globalization and electronic money exchange it's much easier but in those days you had to do it the u.s dollar was not accepted there was no good it had no value this morning we enter a text and the lesson will be about the economics of heaven the common perception is heaven somehow operates on earthly currency christian or not we are those who often believe and act in ways that assume that what is valued down here will legitimize us up there we think that what is accomplished or achieved in this life somehow earns our acceptance for the next this passage in philippians that any read for us will show us clearly that heaven runs on different currency if i may it runs on the coinage of christ any other currency has no value in other words christ is heaven's currency the text has two general movements which leads me to split it into two pieces and have simply labeled them of course with alliterating words uh the first being warning and the second being witness warning and witness paul wants the recipients of this letter to be warned of a threat to their faith and then he stands to bear witness to that faith firstly warning warning warning chapter 3 begins seemingly with a conclusive opening as paul is uh as if paul is wrapping up his letter he is only halfway through it which makes it seem odd uh for he will make another valiant attempt at concluding the letter in chapter 4 verse 8 regardless of the transition the tenor of the writing continues he's brought to the forefront the same exhortation rejoice in the lord rejoice in the lord they are to delight the the letters recipients are to delight in the lord to take great joy and being in the family of god the christian's joy would be sourced in the lord he reiterates it interestingly as a matter of of spiritual safety and welfare it's as if paul is saying rejoice and let me remind you to rejoice rejoice in the lord because so that is not to be forgotten let me remind you to rejoice in the lord with the presumption that you will forget and this is often the help of the scriptures that we don't necessarily acquire new knowledge every time we come to it oftentimes we need to be reminded of it because we tend to forget paul seemed to know that there would be a whole host of things that would sap their joy and we've seen hints of it throughout the letter he's in prison he's under uh he's in prison for really his preaching of the gospel and the philippians are concerned uh there's internal disputes and division there's sickness and hardship in life and as paul is saying as life unfolds as these things take hold as uh life begins to weigh upon you do not forget to rejoice do not forget to rejoice and when we come to verse two something drastically changes the tone of the text changes from the tenderness of a spiritual father that is

encouraging them to rejoice he moves to sound a warning like a watchman on the walls he sounds a warning it's actually a three-fold warning in the english standard version is look out look out look out watch out watch out watch out look out for the dogs look out for the evil doers look out for the mutilators of the flesh and in paul's mind it's likely a single group of people he's referring to people uh writers simply called judaizers there are a strand of jewish uh adherents who were undermining paul's message by demanding that recent converts particularly non-jewish converts require uh and requiring them to keep the laws and the regulations uh of judaism in keeping these laws and regulations they would somehow earn or achieve their salvation they were not new enemies to paul we saw it very early on as the church was established acts 15 you see it in paul's earliest letter to the church uh at galatia where he warns of the same type of people these people promoted a message that was merit-based you can do it you can earn it you can have it if you just set your mind to it it was a performance-oriented salvation and it's difficult to see paul's fury in this in this passage he refers to them as dogs evildoers mutilators of flesh in the first century dogs were not household companions they were not beloved household companions to be a dog was insulting derogatory belittling in some ways it was a slur to everyone who was not jewish it was so demeaning that some interpreters are troubled by the fact that jesus calls the syrophenician woman a dog in mark 7. regardless paul attributes their work as evil and calls them mutilators of the flesh people uh he's referring to this jewish right of circumcision early as the people of israel are being founded in genesis 17 paul makes this or god makes a promise to a man named abram abram will be the head of the people of israel and in making this covenant promise they are to seal it with a sign the sign was that of circumcision a cut to distinguish them as god's people and paul here is referring to this right and he's accusing the judaizers of being a false circumcision what they do he is saying they're not circumcised they're actually mutilating the flesh they are not circumcising according to god's covenant what they do is what the pagan nations around them do they perform a ritual that's void of meaning in other words paul is calling out these judaizers and equating them with the unbelieving gentile even those outside of god's promises for the religiously devout this would have been a harsh criticism to put it simply paul is equating them with unbelievers watch out for them look out for them be forewarned of them he sounds the warning against the false teaching and then he follows up in verse three with marks of a true christian this is who we are not and this is who we are we are threefold we are those who worship by the spirit of god we are those who glory in christ jesus we are those who don't

put confidence in the flesh we are the circumcision an authentic believer is marked by these three attributes they worship god in the spirit paul here affirms jesus assertion in in john's gospel do you remember the encounter that jesus had with a woman at the well and they're talking about worship and genuine worship and to this woman he's uh he explains that worship will now happen in spirit and truth it will no longer be tied to a city namely jerusalem it will no longer be tied to a building namely the temple jesus asserts that worship was no longer confined by a physical place or a sacred space instead true worship would now take place through the medium of the holy spirit where would it take place anyway the emphasis would now move from the physical to the spiritual from the outward ritual to the inward heart it would be as some have put it it would be from the inside out not from the outside in in see this is what enables you and i to worship at all times at all places this is what enables us to give our whole life as an act one big continuous act of worship not only is a true christian one who worships by the spirit but glories in christ more woodenly translated posts about jesus christ makes much of him and by implication puts no confidence in the flesh you see the warning has been sounded watch out look out for teaching that requires external rituals or actions thinking that they somehow achieve right standing before god well we know the warning is significant because our prideful tendencies of status achievement accomplishment are strong mentally i know i'm saved by grace through faith alone i cognitively know that it's not my own doing it's a gift of god it's not the result of work so i can't boast but if you're like me you slip into this idea that we live in a meritocracy if i do well i'm more approved if i'm more obedient i'm more accepted if i'm kind more merciful more generous more patient i'm more loved or lovable yet this is what the text is trying to combat the currency of our efforts to buy salvation to obtain salvation to purchase it has no value earning our salvation actually undermines the gift of god god does not need your assistance to save you god does not need my assistance for my deliverance in securing your salvation the death and resurrection of christian of jesus is the sole payment price and exclusive currency do you want to know how saddening our attempt at purchasing god's gift of salvation or earning it appears i borrow from from a book with this illustration consider a parent a loving parent their young child has a birthday coming up and so they go and acquire the perfect gift for this child's birthday meticulously wrapped presented and there the child the young child eagerly unwraps it tears the wrapping paper unpackages

the gift receives it with great great joy gives the parent a hug tell them this is just what i wanted this is perfect i love you of course the parent's heart would leap and all of a sudden the young child scampers down the hall goes into their bedroom and from a distance you hear the planking of a piggy bank the emptying of a piggy bank after a few minutes there the child dashes down the hallway with two fistfuls of coins and goes to the parent who just gave the gift and said here the gladness of the parent turns into sadness why the child did not understand the nature of the gift and oftentimes i think that's how we approach god oh great gift god great gift jesus priceless priceless salvation eternal forever secure and there we go dashing down the hall hey will this degree help me will this act of mercy help me will this this generous gesture to my neighbor help me and god looks and i can't help but think you've misunderstood the gift are we not like that child lavishly gifted salvation from our heavenly father only to run to our rooms emptying our piggy banks to pay what was already paid for well as i ponder this text it's intentional that paul opens up with this chapter to rejoice in the lord rejoice in the lord rejoice in the lord and his tone changes and then he says before warned lest you get in stared by the dogs the evil doers the mutilators the flesh the naysayers the doubters the too good to be truers if you listen to them you will be sad of your joy if you forget the grounds of your salvation you will lose your joy if you neglect what actually makes a true christian your joy will be depleted don't be misled if you work for your salvation you will be deprived of joy christian joy is based on a completed work christ's work it's a completed work it's a submitted work it's been graded and returned and accepted or it is a finished work the sure way to lose your joy is tragically to think that your salvation is based on your performance if you think this way you're going to plummet yourself into despair you know why you're never going to be good enough you will never achieve enough you will forever live with what i know university students call imposter syndrome i don't belong here i'm not smart enough clever enough everyone around me was valedictorian too that will plague you if you're misled in this way if you think you have to be as good as the next person no you're not and as c.s lewis has helpfully illustrated we're mere beggars telling others other beggars where to find bread and so often if you're like me i want to be the baker i want to make the bread

[20 : 10] none of us are bakers none of us are bakers we're not bakers christian joy flows out of the full deposit that fills your account it covers the first month rent the last month rent and every single month in between it's been paid by christ alone in full and so he sounds this warning he sounds this warning and then he testifies you want to witness let me bear witness i can attest to genuine faith verses 4 to 11 witness it has been noted that these eight verses are autobiographical and you can see that just given the number of i i i i i statements all this making elsewhere in the bible such as acts 9 you know a little bit about paul's conversion what life was like when he met jesus we know what physically took place the setting the characters that were involved but it's here we're given this unique glimpse into his heart what did god do inside of him well so here upon meeting jesus he holds out his own life and he uses his own life as a apologetic autobiography to defend the validity of the christian faith one writer puts it this way he would use his own life to outshine the judaizers in order to undermine them and more ironically one commentator writes this is the an expression of intense irony he would condemn himself while he seems to exalt his former self you see that there's immense power and personal witness in a few weeks time we will have a baptism at promontory point and there will be a few individuals and this is what they're going to do this is how i met jesus this is what he did to me this is what he's done for me and this is what's resulted see the power of personal witness continues to serve as one of the most compelling and convincing aspects of christianity that's why we ought to tell one another this is what jesus did this is what he's doing this is what he will do to one another and to your neighbors and friends and you'll see in these verses paul does something interesting he puts it all in economic terms he starts counting or accounting what took place he assesses the game considers the loss in some ways he's performing i think what we call cost benefit analysis will my gains exceed my losses will my business stay afloat will there be a large return on investment will this uh achieve long-term security and so he lays things out in two columns on one column this is my fleshly confidence and let me tell you about this fleshly confidence now the word itself could mean just the stuff that hangs on your bones but here it seems to refer to how do you assess the earthly value of one's existence earthly currency you may call it and he starts jotting down seven seven things sociologists have divided in half or almost half he says some would call it ascribed status some would call it achieved status paul's social status was comprised of these two elements that were ascribed these are things that he received by nature of his birth he didn't do anything to earn these it's just there given where he was born and

whom he was born to and achieved status these are this is the position he enjoyed by personal accomplishment or achievement so you have what's been ascribed circumscribed on the eighth day i belonging to the people of israel the tribe of benjamin significant because we weren't wayward like the other ten tribes and in our land dwells israel and the temple i was a hebrew of hebrews not tainted in any way i wasn't a convert i was born into this and when you take these four together assertion is clear the value is certain of flawless stock impeccable heritage the right pedigree he was not only born with a silver spoon in his mouth he was born with a silver spoon and a golden goblet in his hand and birth he had distinguished status and if that was enough he would go on and say well i achieved a few things as well as to the law i belong to the pharisees as to zeal i was a persecutor a hater on the church as to righteousness under the law i was blameless he belonged to the strictest set of the pharisees highly educated formally trained academically accomplished if you're curious about his allegiance he tells us there his motivations his zeal was clear he would travel the region to prosecute christians and many of you know that he stood there at the execution of the first christian martyrs stephen approving of it if you've wondered about his record you would find a clean slate no violations no moving violation no parking violation no citations externally externally perfect prestige distinguished elite unmatched now if anyone could stand righteous before god it would be paul if anyone could stand on their own merits before god it would be paul born in such a way accomplished with such distinction zealous religiously zealous upon human evaluation flawless and perfect and this is what makes verse seven so astounding so surprising so shocking all this all of this all these gains are but loss all this merit but loss all this achievement but loss when compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing jesus for paul when god plucked him up from the kingdom of darkness and transferred him into the kingdom of his beloved son he stopped by the currency exchange this is no good in this country let me convert it all to the coinage of christ and let me be clear i'm not saying privileges and accomplishments are evil and sinful but certainly confidence in them is god will use your background your upbringing your achievements accomplishments he will use them as instruments and mediums to honor himself but get this god's salvation will not come through them god's salvation to the great shock of many will not come through pedigree and prestige but come through his son

without christ regardless of how accomplished you are the shock to the world is you could remain unsafe unredeemed unrighteous salvation comes exclusively through jesus christ christ christ and my accomplishment are mutually exclusive when it comes to my justification christianity is not christ plus something christianity is christ plus nothing paul counts it all all things lost knowing the surpassing worth of christ he will suffer loss even the loss of all things knowing the value of christ when all earthly achievement is held in this column and christ is held in the other you know how he evaluates this call loss he uses the esv translates it as rubbish the king james translates it as don modern slag might translate it in other ways but it was worthless the greatest gain in life or paul was to know christ knowing christ was his life's aim have you thought about this have you considered this can you affirm this have you considered the best and most beautiful thing about you is that you know jesus let me say that again have you considered the best and most beautiful thing about you is that you know jesus that you're a blessing to the world because you know jesus you can bless your family because you know jesus you are your workplace because you know jesus you're glad mates your colleagues your co-workers because you know jesus i am so sinfully enamored by knowing the right people i want to know people in positions of power i want to know those in renown fame high social status i like to humble brag and say oh i'm acquainted with this person as if i can exalt myself i rush to let it be known that i know so and so all the while when the opportunity comes to let people know i know jesus i retract i retreat i shrivel i back down oh god help me help us as this costly exchange took place in the life of paul he recognizes that a greater exchange had taken place he had not only took all his earthly attainments to the currency exchange and traded them all for christ but he lived out that story jesus told you remember it there was a man who found a treasure in the field once he dug it up he reburied it and what did he do took all his things all his earners all his power and he acquired that field then in his joy he goes and sells all that he had and bought it that's what paul did that's what paul did but before i close or as i close allow me to point out one other transaction that took place did you catch it verse 9 it's worthy to be underlined paul says i traded my earthly righteousness not only my earthly gains and obtainments uh attributes for christ but i traded myself righteousness

for god's righteousness i exchanged earthly righteousness for heavenly righteousness and before the bar of human courts paul would certainly stand acquitted but he understood in heaven's courts he would need greater righteousness to stand innocent to be declared righteous and justified before god one needs what happened in verse 9 the righteousness of god that comes through christ if you fail to make this exchange you will fail to be acquitted in the court of god's judgment and out of this exchange flows joy to the christian joy that catapults and propels paul's life forward what is life's ambition to know him what is my life's ambition to share in the shape of his life his sufferings his death and his resurrection what is the aim of my life to copy and to imitate him and lord willing rise with him the great joy of the christian is to have the righteousness of god to know him to share in his life his life to be assured that you will be raised to new life and so as i close to borrow from the popular advertisement what's in your wallet what's in your wallet what's in your wallet because it would be a shame if you walked up to the courts of heaven and they're empty and all you have are dollars and degrees what's in your wallet what are you carrying father we thank you for this morning we thank you for the great gain of the lord jesus christ and as we look at paul's life may we imitate him as he imitates you would he count the car would we count the cost and realize the greatest gain of all of life is knowing the lord jesus our righteousness for his our life for his help us help us help us we pray we ask these things for jesus sake amen our