

Philippians 3:1-11

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 November 2015

Preacher: David Helm

[0 : 00] Again, the scripture text is Philippians 3, 1-11, on page 981 of the Blue Bibles. Please stand for the reading of God's word.

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 evildoers.

Look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the real circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh.

Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else 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.

[1 : 20] 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. Amen. I know I tend to often begin sermons lately with a reference to the offertory, and today will be no exception.

Wow. They were in my wheelhouse today. That was Bach. And if that's not your wheelhouse, just come on back because they'll find their way to you as well.

But what a joy to stand in a pulpit and open God's word after that kind of music which takes us to the very gates of heaven.

So there it is. Didn't deal with the sermon, but my sails are filled to preach. Let me pray. Our Heavenly Father, as we now turn our attention to your word, I pray that you would both encourage and equip us to do your will in this world.

[3 : 07] In Jesus' name, amen. A parent and their deepest longings for their children certainly include the child's safety.

You know how it goes. We're all children or parents, and so we have been in a situation where we're going to go out for the night, but the parent will have a couple of words on the front end to make sure we act right.

And they will inform us on what it is to keep everything tight so that we'll be okay on the back side. Come home.

Or, before you get out of sight, I've got a word or two that will keep you safe. It's natural.

A parent's inclination to guard their child by ensuring that they will be safe.

[4 : 24] Paul is a parent of sorts, certainly the father to the church at Philippi. If you haven't read the Acts narrative, he planted this church on his second missionary journey, and they were, in a sense, his children.

And we arrive at a moment in the text where the parental concern of Paul is for the safety of his children. 3.1 He was concerned for the safety of the church at Philippi.

And so we might ask, what kind of safety is he talking about? Does he want them walled off, holed up, separated from, anything that might hurt them?

No, not in fact. His concern is more eschatological in nature. It's a safety into heaven's harbor. It's something that he wants them to live in such a way that they'll really arrive home.

That goes back to his prayer in chapter 1, verses 10 through 12. I'll just look at verse 10 at the moment.

[5 : 44] I've got to get new glasses or a bigger Bible. He's praying, verse 9 of chapter 1, That your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment.

So, here's his occasion for writing, his deepest desire for them, that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

That is his desire that on that day they'll be pure, blameless, safe, home. That they'll arrive at harbor. Interestingly, 3.1, a means by which he ensures for the safety of the local congregation is that they would continue to rejoice in the Lord.

We've been seeing this in the first half of the letter. Rejoicing in the Lord as a corporate community, a local assembly, actually protects our unity and enables us to persevere in adversity.

That's what the first half has been demonstrating. He has a great concern that as you are in the world, but not of the world, and you are laboring for the cause of Christ, you will protect your unity.

[7 : 04] For the whole thing comes crashing down with a congregation that has a factious spirit among themselves. And rejoicing in the Lord is the means by which you persevere with all the onslaught of things that come to you.

Which is why the worship service on Sunday is such an important factor. We bring these elements of hearing the Word together, which you can't do at home.

Singing songs together, which you can't do at home. That we might be rejoicing, which protects and enables us to persevere.

This is Paul's deepest, deepest desire. The safety of the local assembly in Philippi. Having laid out Paul's desire in 3.1, he then now demonstrates his concern.

In other words, these are the words of the parent before the child leaves the house. Having said, I want you home, he now says in verses 2 and 3, Look out for the dogs.

[8 : 24] Look out for the evildoers. Look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are of the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.

This is his word to them. Notice the three-fold repetition of look out. And then the descriptors that come with it. What a drastic change in tone in the letter.

Look out for those dogs when you get outside my door. By this, of course, he meant religious persons, Judaizers in his immediate context, those who would mutilate the flesh, shorthand for requiring circumcision in order to be part of the family of God, and who were filled with all evil work because they were placing burden upon burden upon burden on all the people.

Paul was tired of the burden of the religious folks who were only concerned with the rights of initiation and the purification of law-keeping.

He said, Look out for them. Notice. It's look out for the religious, law-keeping ritualists who, according to their flesh and their right of initiation, think they find right standing with God.

[9 : 59] It's quite an irony. Because when you and I tell our children to look out on the way out the door, the religious are not always in mind.

I guess downfall can come to us all from the ungodly in the street as well as those who profess God.

This was Paul's concern. An unsafe place for the church at Philippi would be a collaboration with religious ritualists bent on rights of initiation.

That is, the flesh. The external indicators of what it is to be a person right standing before God.

In other words, if verse 1 is Paul's desire, namely that you arrive home safe, verses 2 and 3 is Paul's concern, in particular, the others that might shipwreck their faith.

[11 : 23] And the contrast is putting confidence in the flesh as opposed to what verse 2 lays out, the worship of the Spirit of God and the glory that is in Christ Jesus.

So notice, there's the contrast he's setting up. It's as simple as two words. Flesh and faith. What you're going to go out and do to be made right with God versus trusting that it is God at work in you according to all that you go out and do.

This is what he lays out. His concern that they would be upended, in a sense. And so then he proceeds to move beyond his desire and beyond his concern to 4 through 11, which is the thrust of the text.

Paul's own life becomes an expression that exhibits what it is to come to safe harbor. Which is fascinating because in chapter 2, 5 through 11, he brought forth the Lord Jesus Christ as an example through which we were all to live and walk under.

[12:55] But here he brings himself forth as an example in regard to what it means to come to Christ and live according to Christ.

Fascinating. Two pictures, two portraits on the wall. Have you ever been into Harper Library? Well, if you haven't, it's one of the great initial structures put up by Rockefeller on the University of Chicago campus.

Even someone without a library ID card can find their way there. And when you enter that vast hall, you're aware of the need for quiet, for fear that everything in there will echo off the walls.

But if you take ten steps in and turn around, you'll see two massive portraits on the wall. One of Harper, the first president of the university, and the other of Rockefeller, a famous portrait picked up even in his biography.

There they are, the pillars of the institution. Well, in Philippians, we now have two rising portraits before the people.

[14:05] Jesus, chapter 2, the model for all who would walk according to the Christian faith. And Paul, chapter 3, the expression of what it means to come to faith and continue into safe harbor.

So here he is. It's a self-referential illustration. He says in chapter 3 and verse 4, Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also, if anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more.

Circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, 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.

What he's doing here, by way of comparison, is saying, when you get outside your door, and there are those who would offer you a relationship with God according to the flesh, according to their spiritual lineage, and according to their law-keeping behavior, I'm as good as any of them.

I've got all those credentials. If they're looking for an argument by way of comparison, then have them take a look at me, says Paul.

[15:54] Verse 4 and 5, notice again, the repetition of that word. If we're looking to come before God confidently by the flesh, well then, let's stack up the argument and let it roll.

In regard to spiritual lineage, I've got it. You'll see it there. It's dictated in verse 5. Circumcised on the eighth day of the people.

In other words, my flesh has been mutilated. Of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews.

There it is. Spiritual lineage. You want spiritual bloodline, says Paul, as right standing before God? They've got nothing on me. But he goes beyond bloodline to talk about behavior.

Beyond spiritual lineage to speak of something about salvation through law-keeping. Look at there, the end of verse 8, or verse 7.

[17:03] As to the law, that's it, I'm getting new glasses this week. As to the law, a Pharisee.

As to zeal, a persecutor of the church. As to righteousness under the law, blameless. I've got all the behavioral qualifications.

I'm top of the class. I come from the right family. I come from the right people. I come from the right schools. I come from the right upbringing.

I carry the right diplomas. I've been to the right lectures. I went to the right law school. I went to the right business school.

I went to the right social sciences school. Been there. What's the top of the rank? Kuma? Well, I'm glad you know it.

[18:05] I never got that high. Paul could make the argument, I could not. So, do you gain salvation by law keeping?

Paul says, if that's what it takes to have a relationship with God, then I'm the man and I would be safe. verse 7, though, is the anchor here and it's his conclusion of what he's been arguing concerning himself by way of example very clearly.

But, but, whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. he suddenly employs language as if he's in financial securities.

He's now speaking of gains and losses and he looks at all the gains of his spiritual lineage and he looks at all the gains of his lifetime of law keeping behavior as a means by which he would arrive

safely at home.

And he says, I've counted it all as loss. It's all in the red column. It actually, perhaps, wasn't just neutral in the presence of God.

[19 : 36] It certainly wasn't beneficial toward being in the presence of God. Maybe, perhaps, it's actually negative for one in that situation doesn't always understand their need of God.

Gains and losses. That pivot there in verse 7 propels Paul to move beyond the comparison of himself and those of which the congregation is to look out for.

but it transitions him by way of contrast to the way forward for the church.

Chapter 3 verse 8 through 11 is a single sentence. Hear it again as though it is a complete thought. By the way, if you're an English teacher, we all apologize. You can take Paul to school later, but he wins today. This is one sentence. Indeed, or literally, but again.

[20 : 59] He's now contrasting things, not comparing them. 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 in his sufferings and becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible, I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

It builds all things as lost.

And notice right in the middle, he situates the centrality of his faith in contrast to the flesh which tries to get home on your own.

He says that I might not have 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.

[22 : 16] He situates faith and flesh as two different ways of arriving home safe. He had everything in the flesh.

And when he added it all up, a thousand times ten thousand plus four hundred plus whatever it is for this idea and that idea, and all the expenses in it, and he added it all up and he found it was a helium balloon of air, weightless.

And then he looked at faith in Christ who could accomplish for him what he could not do for himself and it had the weight of an anchor that would hold him fast.

not to secure him from his work in the world, but to propel him into it. Notice, he counted all things of loss, not that he could guard himself behind something, but that it actually took him all the way to the lowest parts of the world.

This man went, I count as lost, verse 8, symbolizing the moment of his conversion at Damascus. In other words, I laid it all aside on one day, and I ask you, was there a day when you picked up with Jesus?

[23 : 40] Is there a day where you could say, yeah, I count as loss, and I can tell you the day I began that journey. But then he goes on in present tense, and I continue in a sense, I continue to count all things as loss.

Let me tell you what that looks like for Paul. This was the most learned lettered man of his era.

One of the high flyers of the first century. He not only knew what it was to be in environments where everybody was qualified, he knew what it was to be the most qualified among all the qualified.

And he present tense laid it down. He went from a lifetime appointment in whatever Jewish synagogue he would so please as a professor of law.

law. And he exchanged it for an appointment among the citizenry of the lowest wetlands in the Roman Empire.

[25 : 14] he went from a corner office where he could see it all and own it all to the depths of a Roman jail cell in isolation wherein if he did not receive a cloak by winter would know that he would perish by spring.

He went from conference invitees to small prayer meetings by a river with three or four women looking to find God.

He went from the ability to hold command in the Areopagus among the most learned of his day to scratching penniless among the poor who were looking for a way.

He counted all things lost when he came to Christ. He counts all things lost as he walks for Christ.

He climbed no stairway to heaven.

He climbed no ladder. He went to the cellar. He went below the cellar. He gave it all up. He says if you want to be safe, you want to get home, welcome to the road.

[27 : 02] Paul, deep desire that the church of Christ would be kept safe.

His concern, oh, look out for those who would shipwrap your faith. His own life and expression of the road for all who hold Christian faith.

These final refrains in Ted and Eleven are majestic. they summarize his internal unchangeable directional force that I may know him.

He has said things like this even earlier that I may gain Christ. verse 7 that I may know him.

This three fold wave upon wave of expression allows you into the very heartbeat of Paul all other things on the literally dung heap that I might have this one thing and so when he says that I might know him in the power of his resurrection and share in his sufferings which I take the conjunction there and to bring these two together these two are the means by which he knows him that I might know him And how?

[29 : 15] And the power of his resurrection and to share in his sufferings becoming like him in his death it weds resurrection to a way of life that is ever and always enduring and suffering most people get power wrong the power of the resurrection they think some kind of victorious Christian living they just haven't read Paul enough go turn up 2nd Timothy and see how he uses dunamis every time in the letter at the end of his life it's the power that enables him to endure not the power that comes to him that he can overcome it's the power that puts him into problems not the power by which he's kept out of problems it's the power he talks about in 2nd Timothy 4 that he says that Jesus Christ himself stood by me when no one else would and empowered me to preach the gospel now what does that what it means is the power of the

Holy Spirit that now dwelt in him actually gave him enough strength to keep doing gospel when he was being overwhelmed by life and all alone power is for perseverance so if you want to know the power of the resurrection what Paul is saying it is wedded to sharing in his sufferings there's no other way home that last little phrase that by any means possible my I may attain the resurrection of the dead does not in any way introduce doubt as if he wondered whether he would get home or whether Christ was strong enough as a foundation as one writer says it's simply an expression of expectation this is his expectation that by any means wherever he takes me whatever I go through I want to attain the resurrection of the dead I want to see Jesus I want to get home how about us oh holy trinity church hyde park may

Paul's internal conviction become our own indeed that there would be no distinctions among us whether astrophysicists or aimless whether employed or unemployed whether lettered or unlettered whether white or blue collared you thought I was going to say race let's put it all aside and whatever he has given you go forth from this place with full resurrection ability to make use of it whether that means you are rising to the highest points in the world then you are to make use of it there even Paul was told by

Jesus you're going to testify before kings and there may be a few here who should but generally speaking the way home is the way down and by it you will be safe so let go of all that you're tempted to lean on and grab hold of all that Christ has done as the song says all I once held dear built my life upon all this world reveres and wars to own all I once thought gain I have counted loss spent and worthless now compared to this sing it with me knowing you

Jesus knowing you there is no greater thing you're my all you're my rest you're my joy my righteousness and I love you Lord let's give it a shot again knowing you Jesus knowing you there is no greater thing you're you're my all you're my rest you're my joy my righteousness and I love you Lord now our heavenly father we commit our lives to you in fresh ways seeking in an apostolic way our own safety but oh

[34 : 48] Lord may we be rightly informed by the hearing and the reading of your word and may we seek that safety not in anything that we have come from nor in anything that we accomplish but all that God has done in us and will do through us therefore help us to emulate Paul and find our way to the bottom where we are promised you are there in Christ's name amen well we like to go out with a song so let's do it again today