

The Surpassing Worth Of Knowing Jesus

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Preacher: Mitchell Hodge

[0 : 00] Now, if you would turn back to Philippians chapter 3, that will be our text for our sermon this morning. And I would like to start this morning by asking a question.

What is most valuable in your life? Or perhaps you could think of it this way. What is the last thing that you could be forced to give away?

Maybe it's something of sentimental value, like a gift received from a now departed loved one. Maybe for some, it could be your iPhone. Or perhaps it could be something you deem essential, like your car.

Or all the money in your bank account. Or something that could be symbolic, like your wedding band. You may say that it would be inconceivable to me for someone to take my home and to leave me destitute.

Or that it is unimaginable that I could lose my health and independence. Now, we have many things that we are to be thankful for.

[1 : 08] We have many blessings that God has given us. Yet there is something that we can never sacrifice. The most valuable thing that we have.

Something of eternal weight. Something which gives us hope for now and for the future. Something which takes away fear and judgment. And what we're talking about here is the privilege of knowing Jesus.

What we're going to do today is look at the argument that Paul makes here in Philippians of the surpassing value of knowing Jesus. Now, to begin, there's maybe some prerequisites here.

When we speak about knowing Jesus or knowing God, it could seem improbable that we as human beings could even speak or claim to know God.

From the secular point of view, a religious claim could even sound cringeworthy. So how is it that we as very small human beings in such a large universe can know God?

[2 : 14] One thing that astronomy continues to demonstrate to us is not only that God created an incredibly beautiful cosmos, but one that is unimaginably large.

Where telescopes show us powerful images of space, of stars, nebulae, clouds of brightly coloured gas stretching across the vast expanse of space.

And we are very small, inconsequential perhaps. In fact, if we go back to King David 3,000 years ago, when he looked at the night sky, he said, When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him?

The son of man that you care for him. The radical claim that the Christian makes is that the creator of all of that, the earth, the sun, the moon, stars and galaxies, that not only does he care about us, but that he has made himself known to us.

We cannot put God under the microscope and we cannot use our own experience to know who God is. The prophet Isaiah says, To whom then will you liken God or what likeness will you compare him?

[3 : 32] God who has no beginning, no end. He is infinite, eternal and unchanging. So we cannot find God. And so perhaps Paul is going to give us an answer here to that objection that the claim would be ridiculous to say that we could know God.

And to find the answer to that, we actually have to go slightly further back in Philippians to chapter 2. In chapter 2, we find the grounding of knowing Jesus where Paul teaches on the theme of humility.

And these are very famous verses in Philippians, which starts in chapter 2, verse 5. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God, a thing to be grasped.

But he emptied himself by taking the form of a slave being born in the likeness of men. You see, God gives to us Jesus, someone who is truly human.

He comes to us in humility. He steps down from heaven and he comes down to our level, to the human level. The level of pain, of suffering, of sickness and of sin.

[4 : 58] You see, when we want to know what God the Father is like, we can look to his son, Jesus, God in the flesh.

When we claim we know what God is like, we can do so in confidence because we have Jesus and he comes to us in love. Paul says elsewhere, God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

You see, Jesus steps down from heaven in glory with a mission to seek out disciples. And Jesus loves the unlovely and he loves us to the uttermost.

There wasn't anything in us that made him love us. No standard we had to achieve, no behavior that earned his love. We love because he first loved us.

When we continue in Philippians 2, it says, He emptied himself, taking on the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form.

[5 : 59] He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross. Jesus, who existed in glorious perfection, steps down into our temporal, finite, ever-changing world to die on the cross in your place.

So that the sin that you have committed can be forgiven. He provided the perfect sacrifice so that your guilt can be vanquished.

The late theologian R.C. Sproul often asked unbelievers, What do you do with your guilt? This question penetrates deeply because guilt, as a result of sin, is universal.

We may ignore it. We may desensitize ourselves to it. We may even rationalize it. But it is an internal witness that points us to the concrete reality that we stand guilty before God.

We understand right from wrong. And we see that guilt is something that often manifests itself as fear. Fear of death. Fear that justice does, in fact, exist in the world.

[7 : 13] And that there will come a day in which justice will be served. But Jesus offers us a different way.

He has satisfied the justice of God by taking upon himself our guilt and suffered in our place. So when Paul says the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus is the most important thing in your life because it's a relationship that has been purchased for us.

It's something that's come at a great cost. And it is the gift of eternal life. The perfect son of God dying in our place. For guilty sinners.

So that we can be free. That we can be liberated from sin, guilt and fear. And Jesus exchanges this heavenly glory to come to us in humility.

And he does so not only so that we can be forgiven, but so that we can be lifted up. So that we can be glorified. Raised from our sin. And so that we can know him. Paul says, For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

[8 : 28] Jesus was humiliated. He was brought low. And he suffered a cruel death. And yet this humility, born in Galilee, a man who lives a life of meekness, he gives himself for his people.

In this humility, we find the new glory of Jesus. This meekness of Jesus is his new glorious majesty. You see, God does what is unexpected.

And he turns human standards on their heads. Human expectations upside down. And Jesus came to help the impoverished, the sick, the undeserving, the sinner.

And that's the Jesus that we worship. So if you struggle with doubt and lack of faith, then come to him. God gives us the gift of a new heart that enables us to know him, that is ready to receive him.

And he does so through the work of the Holy Spirit within us, to draw us to Jesus. Jesus said of the Spirit, he will guide you into all truth. The Holy Spirit is the teacher of truth.

[9 : 37] Paul says the Spirit helps us in our weakness. In doubt and in weak faith, the Spirit can minister to us, making God's word alive in our hearts.

And the Spirit helps us to pray, to give us the words to say that when we don't know what to say to God, and he draws us closer to Jesus. Knowing Jesus is of surpassing worth because we don't do it alone.

God helps us. It was he who first loved us. He makes himself known to us. He reveals his son to us. And Jesus sacrifices his perfect life in place of our sinful life.

And the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to be able to see truth. And he helps us in our weakness. Now the next point is that knowing Jesus is of surpassing worth because it's incomparable.

So what do we compare knowing Jesus to? Now this isn't just simply knowing things about Jesus. It's not having some facts about him. There's no uniqueness in having facts about Jesus.

[10 : 43] Cultural Christianity was prevalent in Europe for centuries. It's to know him personally. It's to trust him. It's to turn over our lives to him without worrying about the cost.

To trust him that our obedience to him is in fact for our good and not a burden to us. That he wants us to flourish. That his word facilitates this flourishing.

It doesn't stifle it. Jesus didn't come to make our lives dull, but to give us a bigger vision, a bigger purpose in life. Now Paul borrows this language of gain and loss from the words of Jesus.

This is why we read the Mark passage together. In Mark chapter 8, it said that calling the crowds to him with his disciples, he said to them, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?

[11 : 50] You see, the greatest thing that any man or woman can do is obey the call of Jesus, deny himself, take up their cross, and follow him. That to gain every great and good thing that this world has to offer in sin is not gain at all, but rather loss of the most important thing, which is eternal life with Jesus.

So when Paul says, whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

For his sake, I have suffered loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I might gain Christ and be found in him. What Paul is reminding us here is what he previously thought was gain.

He now counts as loss, what he valued highly before. He now doesn't value any more and he now counts them as rubbish. He renounces his religion of works and he embraces Jesus.

Most of us here will be familiar with the life of Paul. He gives some detail here. He says that he was a Hebrew, a descendant of Abraham. He defended his pedigree. He says that he was excelled in his obedience to the law.

[13 : 03] He was a zealot, a fanatic. He was a very religious man, a very moral man. He was obedient to the law of Moses, but there was a reckoning in his life.

He encountered Jesus. And if we were to trust in these other things, like he was trusting in these other things, it wouldn't be gained to us.

It would be lost because knowing Jesus is incomparable. Now you may object and you could say, well, I don't want anything to do with Jesus. I can find something to substitute meaning and purpose in my life.

I could just deal with my guilt, but anything that you substitute will be ultimately unsatisfactory. Is there anything that you could write down in the list that you could say is comprehensively and ultimately satisfying?

Of course not. And this comes back to God being perfect in nature. He is holy. He is eternal, unchanging, incomprehensible.

[14 : 09] God is self-sufficient and we are not. We are created. We are made by God. There was a day in which we were brought into existence and there is a day in which we will die. And then we face judgment.

We were created by God for a purpose. And so when we are in fellowship with God, when we're close to God, when we trust in Christ, we know him and we can flourish.

When we have been brought into fellowship with Christ, we serve our design purpose to bring glory to God and to enjoy him. When we look elsewhere, when we try and substitute an aspect that God gives us with something other than God is by definition inferior.

That when we look for satisfaction in pleasure or material possessions or in relationships or in our work, things which in and of themselves are good, but they don't give you what they promise to give, which is lasting contentment.

You see, when our desires, when our appetites become dominant in our lives, those appetites and those desires become our God. When we have a view of God that is too small, we become enslaved to our own desires because they're disproportionate.

[15 : 25] And Jesus has come to set us free from our enslavement to ourselves. You see, human beings need big, glorious purposes in their lives.

That is what we were made for. You were made for a glorious purpose. To find pleasure and satisfaction in God in knowing Jesus.

So it is Jesus who is capable to meet our needs. He's the one who's given us this gift of life. Every good and perfect gift is from Christ. Now, the only miracle of Jesus recorded in all four Gospels, you probably know what it is, the feeding of the 5,000.

And the writers of the Gospels want us to know that this supremely important miracle, that Jesus is full of tender compassion for his disciples and that he meets their needs.

The crowds were hungry. Jesus supplied their food from what appeared to be very little. He made what appeared to be very small into something that was an abundant supply to meet their needs.

[16 : 33] That's the message. In Jesus, he supplies all you will ever need and he fills us with joy and hope.

He gives us knowledge. He gives us understanding. He liberates us from the power of sin, the power of addiction. And in Jesus, we find true freedom, freedom from inferior substitutes, freedom from ourselves, freedom from our sin.

And when we're in fellowship with him, we fulfill our purpose and we find our true humanity. Now, when we look back at the text, we see another reason that knowing Jesus is incomparable and that is found in the word righteousness.

And righteousness is a word that is at the heart of the Gospel and is something that Paul now considers to be gain. In verse eight, 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 might 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.

Paul sets his heart on righteousness and not a righteousness that comes as a result of obedience, but a righteousness that comes through faith. So what is righteousness?

[18 : 12] Jesus said that righteousness is something which is essential. He said something very sobering where he said, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. righteousness. Now, righteousness refers to the relationship between God and man. It could be said to refer to the straightness of that relationship.

A righteous action would be one that conforms to the requirements of the relationship. And God is the one who always keeps his side of the deal. But we don't.

We transgress. And there's injustice. And we're the guilty party. Our path isn't straight. It's crooked. And our relationship with God is broken.

And Paul says here that the righteousness that we should seek, this restored fellowship with God, this straight path, is not achieved of my own that comes from the law.

[19 : 15] Whereas if somehow our outward observances could somehow restore this, that it could balance the account, no amount of good actions on our part can make a crooked path straight.

But through faith in Jesus, we receive his righteousness. The righteousness of Jesus is counted as our righteousness.

This is the great truth of the Reformation. This legal transaction that the righteousness that belongs to Jesus belongs to us through faith in him. because Jesus is the only one who can make our crooked path straight.

He dwelt with the Father in glory, in perfect unity, in righteousness. And he came to earth and was the only man to ever live a perfect life. And the death of Jesus satisfies the justice of God against our sin.

And he gives us this gift of righteousness so that we can stand before God. And when God looks at us, he sees Jesus and the work that he has done for us.

[20 : 23] We receive this by faith. When we have faith, when we trust in him, we have a new position before God. We are clothed in the righteousness of Jesus.

Now, nothing could compare to that, that Jesus, the righteous one, should die in our place to give us eternal life. And if you're sitting here this morning and you know Jesus, then you have eternal life.

Your sins are forgiven. You stand right before God and you are righteous in his sight because you know Jesus. Now, I could go on this morning giving many more reasons why knowing Jesus is incomparable, but maybe we just have to move on to the final point, which is that the surpassing worth of Jesus should shape us.

The whole purpose of this book is that we should follow the pattern of the life of Jesus. It's impossible for a person who's come to know Jesus not to be shaped by it, not to have an outward transformation that others can see.

Now, if everything that I've said up to this point is true, then knowing Jesus should be the defining aspect of who we are. It ought to be center stage in our lives. And this is what Paul is calling us here.

[21 : 41] He's calling the Philippians and therefore he's calling us here. He's saying, I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

He tells the church to press on, to keep going, that if we have trusted in Jesus, then we should imitate him. Imitate his manner of life and how he treated others, how he cared for others.

We ought to have this mind of humility in our hearts that we saw in chapter two, have this mind in you that was also in Christ Jesus.

And there are things that we have to lose when we come to Jesus and one of those is our pride. Some things we just have to, we have to give up, we have to cast aside and we have to follow the pattern that Jesus lays for us, that we are to strive forward for the goal of knowing Jesus and imitating him.

This knowledge of Jesus is experiential. It's not a passive knowledge of the facts of the death and resurrection of Jesus, but we are to entrust our lives to him, that we should seek his will for our lives every day, that we should live with this higher and bigger purpose in mind, that we should be seeking more of God, to know God more, to enjoy him more, and to be shaped by knowing Jesus to an ever greater degree.

[23 : 09] In knowing him, we become more satisfied. So coming to an end, I actually want to say where we begin.

Where does knowing Jesus begin? In his book, G.I. Packer, Knowing God, gives four points. He says that the beginning is that we must know about God and knowing about God, the first thing perhaps we need to recognize is that we don't know very much about God and maybe the things we do know about God aren't very biblical.

We start on this path of knowing Jesus by first knowing about him. We should find out about the life of Jesus, his ministry, be amazed at his love, marvel at his miracles and find out what he's like.

Then we should throw ourselves onto the mercy of God. The temptation, once you begin to find out about God, is that when you read the law of Moses, when you see that you don't match up, you miss the mark, then you could despair, you could give up, or you could seek, like Paul was seeking, by trying to please God, by keeping the law.

But you'll find out that you're just rowing against the tide. You need to give up and trust in Jesus for your salvation. Then you come to Jesus in faith.

[24 : 29] Faith is giving assent to the truthfulness of the claims of Jesus, as well as consent to him being the Lord and master of your life. And we commit our lives to him, we mark ourselves out as being a follower of Jesus, and we demonstrate our faith by obeying him, through loving those around us.

And we imitate him. And we become his disciples. We should seek to grow as Christians together, as a community, Lord's Day by Lord's Day, serving each other as best we can, in whichever way that God has gifted us in our service to each other, we should find ourselves becoming more and more like the one that we profess to know.

So the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus is found in the reality that he's the one who first loved us, that he has sacrificed himself to us, that he has made himself known to us.

Knowing Jesus is of surpassing worth because it cannot be compared to anything else. It is Jesus who meets our needs. He gives abundantly more than we need.

That when we know Jesus, all the other pleasures and gifts in our lives find their true place and proportion as we pursue the greater purpose of knowing him.

[25 : 48] And he gives us this gift of righteousness so we can stand guiltless before God on the day of judgment. And we are to be shaped into the likeness of Christ as we serve him together in community.

As someone has said before, Jesus is the path and Jesus is the goal. So let's bow our heads in a word of prayer. We thank you, Lord, for your word to us.

We thank you for these great and marvellous truths that you have made yourself known to us, that we can have confidence in saying that we know you because Christ has come, that he has come to our level, that he lived a human life, that he lived a perfect life, that he died, that he rose again from the dead and that he lives and reigns with you eternally.

We thank you for your gift of righteousness to us, that we can stand guiltless before you. We thank you that you have given us the gift of your word so that we can read and know more about Jesus, so that we can imitate him in this manner of his life.

We pray, Lord, for a mind of humility to dwell with us richly, that it would be something that we would know and experience in our lives and those around us. And we pray, Lord, that you would help us to find those areas in which we can serve you as a community in Christ.

[27 : 09] And we pray, Lord, that you would knit us together in one common spirit in Christ. And so we ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.