

A Shared Righteousness

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[0 : 00] 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 a 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.

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.

Well, good morning. My name is Andy. I'm one of the assistant ministers here. It's great to see you. If you are to follow along with the talk, then it's on the service sheet as you were given on the back.

[1 : 59] Simon has prayed, so we'll get started. I don't know if you've ever seen the Antiques Roadshow. It's a BBC classic, isn't it?

If you haven't seen it, this is basically what happens. A member of the public brings something they own to show an antiques expert, maybe a tea set they bought at a car boot, or a painting that has been handed down through the family.

And there's this five-minute consultation going on, typically in a National Trust property, and the audience are gathered round. The expert examines the item, looking for damages, thinking about the backstory behind it, where it's come from.

And it's all very nice. It's all very quaint. Everyone's crowding around. The owner's nodding along. Everyone's nodding along. But really, they're waiting for one question.

They've got one question in our minds as you watch along. How much is it worth? How much is it worth? We're waiting for that moment when the expert says, it's worth an absolute fortune.

[3 : 07] And the owner just quietly tries to hide how excited they are inside. Or, actually, it's worth just a few pounds. And the owner just tries to hide how disappointed they are.

How much is it worth? Well, we're in the middle of Paul's letter to the Philippians, and the question today is how much is Jesus worth? What is the value of personally knowing Jesus?

Is knowing Jesus worth more than our achievements, our privileges, success, status, stuff? Is knowing Jesus worth more than our reputation amongst our friends, family, and colleagues?

Now, the Apostle Paul wants us to see from these verses that knowing Jesus is more valuable than anything else in the whole world. world. Just scan down to verse 8.

I count everything as lost, says Paul, because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Remember, this is a church that is going well, but they're up against it.

[4 : 18] Paul is writing from prison. He's not sure whether he's going to die or make it out. Nero is going to be emperor in three years' time. He's going to set fire to Christians for fun. Yet chapter 1 talks of the privilege of being a Christian.

Not just in belief, but in suffering. Chapter 1, verse 27 and 29, a key verse we keep coming back to, if you look with me. Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ so that whenever I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit with one

mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.

And then verse 29, for it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him, but suffer for his sake. As we've seen throughout this letter, Paul wants these Christians to strive side by side with a suffering for the gospel mindset.

He holds up the mindset of Jesus in chapter 2 of suffering for the eternal well-being of others. And the role models of Timothy, who served sacrificially, and Epaphroditus, who suffered and nearly died for the sake of Christ.

And yet Paul knows this isn't easy. And we'll be tempted away from this way of living. And so if chapter 2 is about walking the way of the cross and suffering, well chapter 3 is about avoiding the way of the cross and suffering.

[5 : 58] In the midst of temptation to duck out of suffering for Jesus, Paul wants us to be crystal clear that knowing Jesus is worth more than anything this world can offer, even worth the suffering that comes attached.

And to convince these Christians of that, Paul reminds them of two key truths. Religious pedigree and performance are worth nothing. That's the first thing.

Religious pedigree and performance are worth nothing. Paul states the presenting issue in verse 2. Look out for the dogs. Look out for the evildoers.

Look out for those who mutilate the flesh. In Paul's sights are those who are called Judaizers. They're professing Christian believers but who insist that Christians follow Jewish customs and practices.

Particularly here, circumcision. And Paul deals with them in the strongest terms, doesn't he? When we read the word dogs, we're not to think cute puppies but impure, wild animals roaming through the streets for scraps.

[7 : 06] So think urban fox or dingoes in the Australian outback. And ultimately, they're not just merely misguided people. But evildoers. How so?

Because they put confidence in the flesh and teach others to do the same. Maybe you spotted that was the repeated phrase in verses 3 and 4. So verse 3, for we are the circumcision who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.

That phrase comes twice again in verse 4. And by confidence in the flesh, Paul simply means confidence in myself to be acceptable to God.

I just think, flesh is self written backwards with an extra H. So when we read flesh, when we read flesh, just think self. And so these false teachers insisted on circumcision to be acceptable to God. but Paul wants us to know that the flesh, our own efforts, count for nothing. And so in verse 4, Paul says, well if you want to play that self-confidence game, don't bother, I'll play you off the park.

[8 : 21] And then he reels off his religious CV or his UCAS personal statement depending on how old you are. At first comes his religious pedigree. So verse 5, he circumcised on the eighth day.

Exactly the right date he circumcised according to the Old Testament law. He's of the people of Israel. He's a member of God's chosen nation. Of the tribe of Benjamin. One of the two tribes that remained loyal to King David.

He's a Hebrew of Hebrews. Thinking of his parents to use a Harry Potter term, he's a Hebrew pureblood, not a Gentile muggle. Paul's from good stock.

And he also had an impeccable religious performance. Verse 6, as to the law of Pharisee. Pharisees, the gold standard law keepers, even making up rules to make sure they don't break God's law.

As to zeal, a persecutor of the church. As to righteousness under the law, blameless. Not that he never sinned, but his life had been exemplary in following God's law as he interpreted it.

[9 : 33] In a game of religious top trumps, Paul is the best card in the pack. He is top dog. He's top of the league without any rivals. But the hammer blow comes in verse 7.

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. It's like Paul is doing some accounting on an Excel spreadsheet.

I don't know if that excites you or not. He's putting all of verse 5 and 6 in the profit column. And when he looks down at the total, he's got huge sums of credit or so he thinks.

But now, verse 7, all of that has been transferred across, copied and pasted, onto the loss column. Everything he'd spent his life accumulating, all those spiritual brownie points, all of his pedigree, his performance, he now looks back on as loss.

Not just negative, but damaging. If you're here looking in on a Christian faith, perhaps you can begin to see how completely opposite to society's way of thinking this is.

[10:46] There are millions of people whose confidence before God is put in themselves. Maybe their pedigree, I'm from a Christian home. I'm from a Christian nation, perhaps.

All confidence put in our performance. I'm a decent person. I give to charity. I try and do good and do those things in my life. I go to church, even the right church.

I was baptised. Lots of people have this confidence in the flesh attitude when it comes to being accepted by God. God. But ultimately it's a misplaced confidence.

It's actually a damaging confidence because it counts for nothing in our standing before God. Well, as we said earlier, it's wonderful that Camille has been baptised today.

She has the wonderful privilege of having Maxime and Rosalie as her parents, being brought to church from the womb. but the Bible is clear, as Maxime and Rosalie are, that even though baptism and having Christian parents and coming to church are great privileges, they cannot make us right with God on their own.

[12:00] Last week I saw a funny video of a football fan trying to beat the queues at a tube station by running up the down escalator. He looked a bit worse for wear and everyone's cheering him on, but every time he gets near the top he falls and goes back down again and everyone laughs.

He probably hurt himself, but like I said it was a funny video. And no matter how hard he tried, he just couldn't reach the top. Well the Bible is clear for us that no matter how hard we might try, we cannot reach the top of the escalator when it comes to God.

We don't even get close. And so in fact Paul is warning us against putting confidence in the flesh, in self, in our religious pedigree and performance to be acceptable to God.

But there's more to it because he's also warning us about putting our confidence in those things in order to be acceptable to others. And Galatians is another letter that Paul wrote.

He writes about these false teachers there as well who seem to dog his steps wherever he goes. I put a verse on handouts from Galatians chapter 6 verse 12.

[13:18] It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.

These teachers are pushing circumcision in order to avoid suffering. Well just a reminder of the historical context. Philippi had been granted a status of a Roman colony.

It's proud of its links with Rome with all the privilege that flowed from it. And at this time the Jewish faith was a legally accepted and registered religion in Rome.

And Christianity was still seen as a kind of outlying sect of Judaism seeking to depart from the mainstream. And it seems as though these Jewish Christians were wanting to combine Christianity with Jewish practices in order to still shelter under this protective arm that Judaism enjoyed.

Wanting to maintain a socially respectable religion rather than being seen as an outlying sect. Being part of the mainstream in order to avoid the suffering that comes.

[14:31] Now it's probably unlikely that we're going to face a temptation to adopt Jewish practices in order for us to be acceptable to others. But there is still that underlying temptation if we'd call ourselves a follower of Jesus to make our faith more socially acceptable in order to avoid suffering for Jesus.

Just think on a personal level life would be a lot easier if we were less insistent that our good works get us nowhere with God. Would be acceptable to others if we said actually there are more than one way to God.

count and our works do count actually. Insisting that our pedigree and performance are worthless doesn't win us any friends and may well invite conflict.

Oh you're part of that church are you? I wonder if anyone said that to any of us before. And then it comes this pressure on a national church level. So instead of national church denominations pushing circumcision in order to be socially acceptable it's perhaps instead downplaying sin or the nature of God's punishment on sin.

Saying there are many ways to God or pushing the world's view on contentious issues like gender and sexuality. And when that happens churches face a choice except that form of Christianity sheltering somewhat under the protective arm that it offers have more respectability in the eyes of the world or stick with Jesus and the Bible's clear teaching and suffer scorn in the denomination and world's eyes.

[16:16] That is the pressure the church in Philippi face and it's the pressure that churches face today up and down the country adapting a form of Christianity that is more acceptable to others all in order to avoid suffering.

And so how do Christians and churches withstand this pressure and strive side by side in the gospel with the suffering that it brings? Well by rejoicing in Christ and by valuing Jesus more than anything.

And that's Paul's next point. Religious pedigree and performance are worth nothing but personally knowing Jesus is worth everything. The only thing left in Paul's prophet column on his Excel spreadsheet is Jesus Christ.

Verse 8 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.

knowing Jesus moved everything from the prophet column to the loss column. And this isn't just knowing things about Jesus.

[17:34] Notice the word my. Knowing Jesus Christ Jesus my Lord. The 16th century reformer Martin Luther said this.

The life of Christianity consists in possessive pronouns. It is one thing to say Christ is our saviour. It's quite another to say he is my saviour and my Lord.

For Paul personally knowing Jesus as his Lord changed everything. And he doesn't go for caveats does he?

And so verse 8 I count everything as loss. for the sake I've suffered loss. The loss of all things and count them as rubbish.

They're worthless. They're like monopoly money. Everything this world offers status, privilege, reputation, stuff, success, career, money are like the contents of your black bin.

[18:40] Paul thinks of his past performance and pedigree as rubbish. And so in the words of R.E.M., this is Paul losing his religion but gaining Christ.

And the reason that Jesus is worth so much more than anything else is in Paul's repeated use of R.N.R. Not rest and relaxation but righteousness and resurrection.

Personally knowing Jesus is worth everything because in him we have righteousness from God. Now look down at verse 9 with me.

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. The word righteousness here just means to be declared innocent to be in the right with God.

[19:46] And Paul says three things about this righteousness in verse 9. It's not achieved by us keeping the law. That is why we put no confidence in the flesh and ourselves because there's no way we can achieve it on our own.

We can't achieve our own righteousness. No way we can get to the top of the escalator. But instead it comes through faith in Christ or more literally through the faithfulness of Christ.

It's all down to his perfect obedience even to death that we saw in chapter 2. And we receive it by faith. A righteousness is a free gift to us.

Like a Christmas present that you're all buying at the moment. Not once have my children tried to pay me for a present. It just doesn't work like that. They just receive it.

And that is what faith is. Receiving something without trying to pay for it. And so here then is the great news at the heart of the Christian faith.

[20:49] That on the cross Jesus took God's punishment for our sin. And when we put our trust in Jesus' death on the cross I'm given Christ's perfect record.

His sinless record as a gift. So that when God looks at me he sees Christ. Well the right response to that is to rejoice.

That's how Paul starts in verse 1. This is the truth that the Philippians need to keep hearing. it's the same truth that we need to keep hearing. We can know Jesus personally and be declared perfect by God because of Jesus' death in our place.

That's what Camille will grow up hearing again and again. And when we remind ourselves or hear that truth over and over again each time it should cause us to rejoice in the Lord.

even when suffering comes because of it. Personally knowing Jesus is worth everything because in Jesus we have righteousness from God.

[21 : 57] But Paul's not finished yet because Jesus is worth everything also because in him we have resurrection power in suffering. Verse 9 again 10 again that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share or literally partnering with him in his sufferings becoming like him in his death that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Personally knowing Jesus and receiving righteousness from him will mean experiencing his resurrection power and that for Paul is a brilliant thing because it will mean he will have the power to live like Jesus in his suffering.

Here Paul weaves in these themes from chapter 2 for Jesus the order was suffering then resurrection but notice in verse 10 it's been swapped first resurrection then suffering.

For these Christians in Philippi who are tempted to keep a low profile or adopt a more respectable form of religion in the face of opposition well Paul encourages them and us that Jesus' resurrection power is made available now.

Resurrection power to strengthen, to serve and to suffer together. And as Paul lives this way suffering and serving others he is confident that death won't be the end.

[23 : 34] That's what he means at the end of verse 11. Paul looks forward to a day when he will be with Jesus forever not because of his own performance but because of the performance of Jesus and Jesus' righteousness given to him.

Well then so what of us? Well the choice in Philippians 3 1 to 11 is the choice of valuing respectable religion that is ultimately worthless or valuing Christ who is worth everything.

And when we see the surpassing worth of personally knowing Jesus we'll be willing to accept the reproach of the world and not trade righteousness for respectability.

To live this way we need help. In fact we need resurrection power. A resurrection power to partner together serving like Timothy and suffering like Epaphroditus.

perhaps that looks like willing to cross the pain line inviting a friend to a carol service or the wreath making or offering to read the Bible with a friend and not ducking out when the gospel becomes controversial.

[24 : 49] Taking the hit of our respectability and status amongst friends, family and colleagues. As I close then, in 2014 a US metal dealer bought a golden egg for 8,000 pounds at a brick-a-brack sale, a car boot sale, thinking he could melt it down into gold.

But after reading a newspaper article he realised it was a rare Fabergé egg made for Russian royalty and was actually worth 20 million pounds. Once he saw the true value he didn't trade it. for some melted gold. Well Paul wants us to see the true value of personally knowing Jesus so that we wouldn't trade him for anything else in the world because everything is rubbish compared to the surpassing worth of personally knowing Jesus even a 20 million pound Fabergé egg.

And through the hardship like Paul we can look to the certain resurrection from the dead and a great and glorious everlasting future with Jesus to come.

together back here. o young