

Righteousness That Comes Through Faith in Christ

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Date: 03 July 2016

[0:00] Amen. Amen.

So it's good to be back. It was good to go to my hometown and visit with my family. We had a lovely time. But it's also good to be back home in Syracuse with our church family.

We miss you guys. Good to be back. Amen. So Raymond last week took the appropriate passage for Philippians and preached a stunner of a sermon.

I'm afraid you're going to have to settle for my feeble efforts after that. It's a tough act to follow. Well done, Raymond. So if you could, please look in your Bibles.

Philippians chapter 3 beginning in verse 1. Now one thing that struck me as I was looking at this passage is that Paul goes after those who would insist on circumcision and keeping the law of Moses, calling them dogs and evildoers.

[1:37] Now those seem like pretty harsh words, but then I remembered as I was preparing for this sermon of Paul's even harsher words for that same crowd in the epistle to the Galatians.

What I regard as perhaps the most humorous passage in the New Testament. Speaking of those same folks in Galatians 5, Paul writes, I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves. Now kids, if you don't understand what that means, ask your parents when you get home. That is not exactly where Paul starts in our passage for this morning.

Starting in verse 1, we see a clearly more positive note. In our passage for this morning, Paul is talking about the many things, insistence on circumcision being one of them, that might result from our insistence that our salvation is found in our works rather than through faith in Jesus Christ. And he's clear that once we have known Christ, once we've really known Christ, everything that we placed our hope in before, everything we've trusted before, everything we've valued before is worthless by comparison.

[2:57] In verse 1, Paul begins this passage by saying, Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.

Rejoice in the Lord. That sounds simple enough, but how are we supposed to do that? What exactly are we supposed to be rejoicing about? What does that mean? Judging from what we see in the later verses in this passage, I think it's safe to say that what Paul has in mind here is rejoicing in what it means to know the Lord Jesus, to know who He is, and to know what He has accomplished on our behalf.

So we rejoice in the Lord Jesus. We rejoice that He is the eternal Word of God, that from the beginning He was with God and was God. We rejoice that He became flesh and dwelt among us. We rejoice that He is the perfect spotless, sinless Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. We rejoice that He lived in perfect obedience to the will of the Father for us.

We rejoice that He died for our sins, that He took the penalty for our sins so that we could have free and full forgiveness. We rejoice that we have been justified by His blood, washed in His blood.

[4:20] We rejoice that He has ascended to the right hand of the Father where He ever lives to make intercession for us. We rejoice that He is coming again in glory to judge the living and the dead.

His kingdom will have no end. Isn't that a reason to rejoice? If we rejoice in the Lord Jesus, if we rejoice in the Gospel, if we rejoice in who Jesus is and what He has done, if we treasure Jesus, we will have a safeguard from the kind of false teaching that Paul goes on to talk about.

Because knowing Jesus is a treasure that is beyond all compare, and anything less will be shown for the absolute garbage that it is. So that sets the stage for what Paul goes on to say.

Paul is going to be talking about treasuring Jesus, treasuring the Gospel, clinging to the Gospel, clinging to the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ as our only hope.

He will demonstrate that every other hope, every other ground of confidence is no surer than a house that is built on sand. In verse 2 we read, Look out for the dogs.

[5:46] Look out for the evildoers. Look out for those who mutilate the flesh. Now we've already talked a little bit about these folks and about what Paul wishes they would do to themselves.

But Paul is reminding his hearers, ultimately, to watch out for false teachers. And they're out there. They're still there. That hasn't changed.

Now these particular false teachers insisted on circumcision because they thought that salvation, they thought that righteousness was found in the observance of the law of Moses.

Now this particular problem is an example of a common and more general problem. That problem is treating salvation, treating righteousness as something that we attain through our own works and efforts.

You can find that sort of approach in all kinds of forms. One form is what is called moralism. The basic message of moralism is this.

[6:52] We need to be good. Do good things and be nice. Well, the problem there isn't in doing good things, of course.

It's good to do good things and we are expected as Christians to do good works in the power of the Holy Spirit. But it's not enough to do good things, is it? Telling someone to do good things doesn't give that person the power to do good things.

And the law of Moses, what Paul is talking about here is a perfect illustration of that reality. The law could tell people what was good, but couldn't give them the power to do it.

And there's another problem with moralism. Even if we manage to be good by human standards, it's still not good enough. God's standard is perfection, and we have fallen short of that.

Now, moralism has managed to pop up over and over again throughout church history in the life of the church itself. And in the modern era, it helped to pave the way for the kind of revisionism and heresy that have taken over a number of churches and denominations.

[8:12] Think about it for a second. What do you have left once you have stripped the Christian message of the life-changing power of the gospel, and you've denied the power of the cross of Christ?

You're left with Christless Christianity, aren't you? How does that glorify God or save anyone? It doesn't. Now, we see moralism in our broader culture, too.

Scholars are now starting to talk about the popular religion of the contemporary West being moralistic, therapeutic deism. What does that mean? Well, the moralistic, therapeutic deist basically thinks this.

God wants me to be good, and of course I am, and good people go to heaven when they die. God wants nothing more than for me to be happy. God isn't really that involved in my life, but he is there when I need help with something.

At the core of that belief system, really just like the belief system that Paul is denouncing here, is fundamentally the belief in myself as a good person, as a righteous person.

[9:28] That confidence in ourselves, confidence in our flesh, isn't what the gospel teaches. 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.

If we are believers, we are the true circumcision. Our hearts have been circumcised, have been changed by nothing other than the very power of God.

We are the true circumcision. Circumcision of the flesh, according to the law, didn't go deep enough. The law didn't go deep enough. It could tell us what to do, but couldn't give us the power to do it. It could show us our sins, but could not put away our sin forever.

But faith in the blood of Jesus, but the circumcision of our hearts through the indwelling power, of the Holy Spirit, that is a different story.

[10:39] The life-changing, regenerating, justifying, sanctifying grace of God given to us through faith in Jesus Christ is so much more than mere circumcision of the flesh.

So much more than anything. It's everything, isn't it? To demonstrate that nothing else compares, certainly not circumcision or the works of the law, Paul uses the example of his own life in the next few verses, starting in verse 4.

Do I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also? If anyone else thinks he has a 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.

If anyone had reason to think that they might be saved according to the works of the law, that they might be saved according to the flesh, it's Paul.

[11:51] But he tried that and it didn't work. He found something much better, as we'll see. If circumcision could have saved, it would have saved Paul.

He was circumcised precisely the right way, at precisely the right time, but it clearly did not change his heart. Now, simply being part of ethnic Israel could have saved him.

It would have saved Paul. He was of the tribe of Benjamin, a devout Jew from solid Jewish stock.

Not only was Paul circumcised on the eighth day, a Hebrew of Hebrews, he was a Pharisee.

He was committed to following the letter of the law, to teaching others to follow the letter of the law, to placing his hope in the letter of the law. He was so zealous for the works of the law that he persecuted the church for proclaiming righteousness through faith in Christ, apart from the law.

According to the letter of the law, he was doing pretty good. And then the Lord Jesus showed up.

[13:07] Verse 7, whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Paul came to know Jesus.

And that changed everything. Has it changed your life knowing Jesus? mine. It changed mine. So I thought about Paul's conversion.

I thought back to my own conversion. One summer as a teenager, I sat down and decided to read the New Testament without knowing that it would change my life forever. As I read, the Lord reached through his word, through the teaching of the Bible, and claimed me as his own as I sat there reading.

I was hit with the sudden realization that I really, truly believed what I was reading, that Jesus is who he says he is, and it changed me. I realized very quickly that I wanted to spend my life helping others to come to know the Lord I had come to know.

And that is the short story of how I ended up standing in this pulpit this morning. As I was thinking about this, I was reminded of the conversion of one of the great saints and theologians of the church, St. Augustine of Hippo.

[14:30] We talk about his conversion fairly often because it's pretty extraordinary. I thought about how prior to his conversion, he had placed his hope and his trust in his own intellect and his own accomplishments.

I thought about how he had dabbled in lofty, ultimately empty philosophy and false religion and had scorned the simple Christian faith of his mother Monica. Then, again, the Lord Jesus showed up.

You can kind of start to see a pattern emerging there. Augustine later wrote to the Lord of his conversion, You called out and cried out loud and shattered my deafness.

You were radiant and resplendent. You put to flight my blindness. You were fragrant and I drew in my breath and now pant after you. I tasted you.

And I feel but hunger and thirst for you. You touched me and I am set on fire to attain the peace which is yours. That sounds like the Jesus I know.

[15:37] That sounds like the Jesus that Paul is writing about. The one who sets us free from our false self-confidence, our false hopes, the vain imaginings of our hearts.

That is him, isn't it? Paul continues in 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. Paul counts everything as loss.

All of his attempts to save himself through his obedience to the law, all of his pride and his parentage and lineage, all of the vanity of pursuing salvation through something that could never save, it's all loss.

It's more than loss. It's trash. It's rubbish. It's garbage. It's dung. Because knowing Jesus is better. Whatever it is we're hoping in, apart from Jesus, Jesus is better.

[16:49] Whether it's our accomplishments, our works, our plans, our aspirations, our opinions, our pleasures, whatever it is, Jesus is better. It's all garbage in comparison.

Why? Look at verse 9 as Paul explains that he wants to be found in Jesus. 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 came to realize that seeking righteousness of his own through his obedience to the law was a dead end.

And it always is. Seeking salvation through our own goodness will always fail, because no matter how good we are, we can never be good enough.

We might say, well, I'm a pretty good person, and good people go to heaven. But that's a dead end. Our self-confidence is a dead end.

[17 : 55] Our hopes and aspirations outside of Christ are a dead end. There is only one way. to eternal life, to eternal joy, to the fulfillment of the deepest desires of our hearts.

And that is through faith in Jesus Christ. Through faith in his righteousness, faith in his blood, faith in his perfection, faith in his obedience, faith in his atoning death for us, faith in his resurrection, faith in his role as our great high priest who ever lives to make intercession for us.

Our salvation requires perfect righteousness. Now, the bad news is that we don't have it. The good news, the great news, is that there is one who does, and his name is Jesus Christ.

Christ, he will give his own righteousness as a free gift to all who believe in him, so that their sins are forgiven, so that they know that they have eternal life, so that they are filled with the Holy Spirit, so that they finally attain to everlasting joy and the resurrection from the dead.

It's received through faith, not through the works of the law. What does this faith look like? Well, John Newton, an Anglican priest and the author of the hymn Amazing Grace, put it this way.

[19 : 27] He said, This is faith, a renouncing of everything that we are prone to call our own, and relying completely upon the blood, righteousness, and intercession of Jesus.

That is the faith that Paul knew, the kind of faith he's talking about here. Paul renounced everything he called his own, even his own obedience to the law, that thing that he prized above all else before his conversion.

Renounced it all to rely completely, totally, and exclusively on the precious blood, the perfect righteousness, and the high priestly intercession of Jesus Christ.

Paul knew that Christ is the way, the only way, to eternal life. Verses 10 and 11. 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. Paul wanted to know Christ, cling to Christ, treasure Christ, even to the point of sharing in his sufferings, because he knew that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.

[20 : 50] That Jesus is the resurrection. That Jesus is the door, and that if anyone enters by him, he will be saved. Do you know that this morning?

Do you believe that this morning? Christ is the Christ is everything. That he is our righteousness, that he is our hope, that he is the greatest treasure of all.

That he is far greater than anything we could lose for the sake of knowing him. If you know that, and believe that, cling to that glorious gospel truth.

Share it with others. Teach it to your children, to your grandchildren, and charge the pulpit, and throw any preacher out the window if he says otherwise. Help each other to keep the gospel of Jesus Christ central here, Church of the Holy Trinity, now and in the years ahead.

Now this morning, if you were placing your hope in your own goodness, or your own cleverness, or your own efforts, or your own plans, or your own pleasures, or your own aspirations, hope in anything other than Christ, then I urge you, that way is a dead end.

[22 : 17] Repent, turn around, and place your faith in Christ, and you will find that he is incomparably greater than anything you have ever known.

You will say with Paul, you will find, as I found in my own life, that what you trusted in before was like garbage when compared to knowing Jesus.

You will find that the righteousness which comes through faith in Christ is truly amazing. It's more than you could ever hope for.

Going back to another John Newton quote for a moment, he once said toward the end of his life, although my memory is fading, I remember two things very clearly. I am a great sinner, and Christ is a great Savior.

That's true. We're all great sinners. The question is this. Are we great sinners that know that we're great sinners, and know that we need a great Savior?

[23 : 24] Or are we going to be great sinners who live in denial of that truth, and perish because of it? If we are great sinners who know that we are great sinners, then the gospel truth of the

righteousness of God, which comes through faith in Christ, will be music to our ears and joy to our hearts.

We will find that indeed we are great sinners, but that Christ is an even greater Savior. Savior. So may we be found in him, not having a righteousness of our own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen.