

Knowing Christ

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[0:00] Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord.

! In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. So, anyone remember that classic American film, A Christmas Story? Yeah? Alright.

Now, remember the main character, Ralphie. Now, for those of you who know the film, what is it that he wants above all else for Christmas? He wants a Red Ryder BB gun. Despite being warned by everyone, from his own mother to even the department store Santa Claus, that he would shoot his eye out. That doesn't deter Ralphie. His obsession with the Red Ryder BB gun is unwavering. Now, in the end, he does, of course, get his BB gun. And then, he does and then, he nearly shoots his eye out. That's how life goes sometimes. But, I do think in all seriousness, that Ralphie's desire for the Red Ryder BB gun says something really true and really powerful about human nature. Now, if it's not the Red Ryder BB gun, and for most of us over the age of 12, it's probably not, there is pretty much always something that each of us will prize above all other things. And we see that reality on display in our epistle texture this morning from Philippians 3. Now, looking at our first verse appointed for this morning, verse 8, along with the verses that came before it, we get a sort of before and after picture of St. Paul. See what he loved and what he prized. Now, to really get a sense of what's going on here, I don't like the way the lectionary broke this up. We have to jump back a few verses to before where the lectionary has a start for this morning.

So let's do that, starting in verse 3. For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God in glory in Jesus Christ, and put no confidence in the flesh. Now we may ask, what is Paul's point here?

Well, we are God's covenant people and we worship God because we have the Spirit of God through faith in Jesus Christ, not through our confidence in the flesh. Now this contrast that Paul is setting up here sets the stage for the contrast that Paul paints for us in these verses. Not confidence in the flesh, confidence in the Spirit. Not confidence in ourselves, in our works, in our accomplishments, in the things of this world, but confidence in Jesus Christ. Not love for the things of this world, but love for Christ. Now the next few verses give us a really clear picture of what it was that St.

[3:37] Paul loved most, what he valued most, before his conversion to Christ. It's pretty obvious that he did have confidence in the flesh, in himself, before his conversion.

Look at where verse 4 picks up. 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.

Now what Paul is telling the Philippians, of course, is that no one has grounds for confidence in the flesh, or in themselves, or in their accomplishment. But he is saying that if it were possible to have good grounds for confidence in the flesh, he would have had reason for that confidence.

It's clear that he did have that confidence in his flesh before he met Jesus. So why did Paul have that confidence in the flesh before his conversion?

Well, look at verse 5, where he points out that he was circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the law of Pharisee, Paul was born an Israelite. He was born into the chosen covenant people of God.

[5:05] As a baby, he was circumcised according to the old covenant law. Now the picture that he paints here is that his life from infancy was marked by observance to the letter of the law. And his observance of the law wasn't lax. He was one of the Pharisees.

That school of Judaism that in his day was most zealous about observing the commandments of God. About observing the law.

Now Paul goes on in verse 6, As to zeal a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law, blameless. And we might be inclined to wonder here, why Paul speaks of zealous persecution

of the church, as though he regarded it as a positive thing.

Stop and think for a second. Think about what Paul's mindset must have been before his conversion. His hope, his confidence, right, was in the flesh, was in the observance of the letter of the law.

Now the claims of the Christians that he encountered challenged that ground for confidence. By claiming that circumcision is nothing.

[6 : 30] That which he put so much stock in. By claiming that Jews and Gentiles alike are called to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone. By proclaiming that Jesus fulfilled the law.

By proclaiming that we are not saved by works of the law. Paul had reacted to the claims of Christians by zealously persecuting the church.

As one would have expected from a good Pharisee in his day. His ground for hope was in the letter of the law. And you know what he did so far as a sinful human being is able?

A pretty good job, really, of keeping the letter of the law. Now we have a pretty good snapshot here, I think, of what Paul was like before his conversion to Christ.

What did he love? What did he value? And where was his hope found? I think Paul is admitting here that he had placed his hope in himself.

[7 : 47] In his flesh. In his works. His hope was that he would be glorified through his obedience to the works of the law and through his zeal for the law. His hope was in his Jewish ancestry.

His hope was in who he was according to the flesh and in his own accomplishments. His own righteousness. His obedience to the law was what he loved, what he valued, what he placed his hope in above all else.

Something happened to change him, didn't it? As we see in Acts 9, Paul, who was named Saul before his conversion, Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues of Damascus so that if he found any belonging to the way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus. Suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. Falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

And he said, Who are you, Lord? He said, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city and you will be told what you are to do.

[9 : 24] He did what the Lord commanded. Saul, the Pharisee who had been persecuting the church met Jesus.

The light of Christ literally brought him to the ground and it changed everything. Saul, the Pharisee, would become Paul, the apostle, the apostle to the Gentiles because he came to know the Lord Jesus.

Now we see the power of that change back in Philippians 3. Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

He goes on, 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 looks back at what he used to value above all else, the way that he used to glory in his flesh, in his own accomplishments.

[10 : 38] And what does he say? It's rubbish. It is garbage. It is dung. It can't compare to knowing Jesus Christ.

Paul went from glorying in the flesh to glorying in Christ. He went from loving his own adherence to the works of the law to loving Jesus Christ.

Why? All because he met Jesus. And meeting Jesus changed his heart. God turned him from loving, from valuing what could never, ever save him or any of us.

Now look at verse 9 as Paul expresses his greatest desire to be found in Christ. 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. Think about before and after.

[11 : 50] Paul went from striving above all else to be found righteous through his own obedience to the works of the law. He went from that to desire to be found in Jesus Christ.

To have the righteousness of Christ given to him as a gift through faith. Because as Paul wrote elsewhere in Ephesians, by grace we are saved through faith.

And this is not our own doing. It is the gift of God. Now Paul continues to tell us in verses 10 and 11 what he so desires when he writes 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.

What does Paul desire? That he might know Jesus that he might become like Jesus and that he might share in Christ's victory over the grave.

So if you like Paul come to know Jesus to love Jesus to treasure Jesus you know as I was preparing for this sermon I thought back on my own conversion to Christ it didn't include an audible voice didn't include me being thrown to the ground the change in my heart change in my soul the change in what I desired was profound I was a teenage kid at the time who was wrestling with questions of what I believed kind of pushing back against what I had been taught in the Christian home of my upbringing but the summer before my junior year of high school I decided to try and read the New Testament without any preconceived notions see what I would find there I didn't get very far into

[14:13] Matthew's gospel before something amazing happened I realized I believe that Jesus is who he says he is as I read the words of Jesus believe that he really is Lord and I realized that faith in Christ is something I could and should give my life to the spirit as he does works through the word of God to change my heart to cause me to love and to treasure Christ now my before wasn't the same experience as Paul's I wasn't a Pharisee but I certainly went from treasuring things that couldn't save me or satisfy my heart from that to treasuring Christ now this morning I want each of us to think about where we are what we love what we treasure what if

I may draw the analogy again are our own Red Rider BB guns can we say with Paul I count everything as lost because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord can we say that now one thing that should be said even as believers we are prone to get in distracted happens to all of us happens to me I'm sure it happens to you too we're prone to get in distracted sometimes to forget in the deepest desire of our heart deepest desire which is to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and when that happens and it will we should keep this in mind we'll remember what our hearts truly treasure as we spend more time with the Lord more time in the word more time in prayer more time in worship more time gathered with our fellow believers we'll remember now we've looked at what our hearts should treasure what the hearts of believers treasure but let's ask what are some things that human beings are prone to put their hope in other than Jesus well Paul before his conversion placed his hope in his own righteousness and that is still a common problem it might look a little different but at the root it's the same problem people are often prone to say something like this

I'm sure that you've heard this well I believe in God I'm a pretty good person and I try to do what's right here's the problem with that if we're talking about placing our hope in our own goodness none of us are good enough to withstand God's judgment that's the problem God is perfectly holy and requires perfection and one only one perfect sinless man ever lived and that's God's only son the Lord Jesus Christ he was sinless he was perfectly obedient even unto death and if our faith is in Jesus his righteousness is given to us our sins are forgiven because he was obedient for us as our substitute and died the death that we deserve for our sins God's being a pretty good person isn't enough to save us but the righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus

Christ is more than enough and it is the only way that we can please God we might be prone to place our hope in ourselves in other ways we might place our hope and our highest value on our reputations our career aspirations our money our possessions but let's remember we're all going to die and we are not taking that stuff with us when we do knowing Christ and the power of his resurrection is eternal why would we settle for anything less than that whatever it is we might choose to hope in choose to treasure above all else the reality is this my brothers and my sisters if it isn't Christ if it isn't knowing Christ if it isn't knowing the power of his resurrection then it is rubbish it is garbage by comparison but knowing

Jesus Christ is an eternal treasure hope that will never disappoint us in this life or in the next praise be to God in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit Amen