

Losing all to gain Christ

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[0 : 00] Well, two weeks ago, many of us, those of us who are at the morning service, was at the church camp. And I was talking to someone who was telling me about his two kids.

He had an elder daughter and a younger son. They're about two years apart. Both are still in their early primaries. Now, he's saying to me that his younger son was a kid that was just good at everything.

You know, sports of all kinds. He's a quick learner at maths, reading, reading before he started school, that kind of stuff. He's just an all-round achiever. Now, his sister isn't slow by any means, all right?

She's just an ordinary girl. But she just felt like she was because her younger brother was just that good, if not better at her than most things.

And so one day, she said this sparrelling to her dad, I just wish there was one thing my brother isn't good at. Just so I've got one thing over him.

[1 : 03] Now, I have to say that I know exactly how she feels, especially when you struggle to find things to be good at. You just want to be good at something, anything, so you can feel special, to be accepted by others.

Well, it wouldn't surprise you, of course, to know that this is actually an age-old problem because it crops up here in Philippians. Here, of course, the issue is a bit more specific because the question in the Philippians' minds wasn't just about their worth in the eyes of others.

It was worth in the eyes of God. How can they find approval in God's eyes was their question. In one sense, that's really the question that matters, isn't it?

Because if you've got God's acceptance, then, you know, well, people can approve of you. You don't really need that anymore. So let's see what Paul has to say about this tonight.

Now, as you follow the outline tonight, you'll see it's not my standard three-point sermon, but hopefully you'll still be able to follow along. Just to keep you on your toes, I've made a few changes.

[2 : 10] Well, the first thing that Paul does is to expose a group of people who thought they knew the answer to that question. So in verse 2, Paul calls them dogs, evildoers, and mutilators of the flesh.

Beware of what they're teaching, Paul warns. Watch out for them. Now, these are very harsh labels to be using on people, aren't they? But Paul pulls no punches because the Philippians' salvation was at stake.

This was dangerous teaching. So what were they teaching? Well, Paul calls them mutilators of the flesh. So we get an idea from there that they were actually Jewish Christians or Judaizers, as I call them, who promote circumcision as an added requirement for the Gentile believers.

Remember how I talked a couple of weeks ago about Gospel Plus teaching? Teaching that adds to the Gospel? Well, here's an example. They're saying, it's okay to believe that Jesus died for you.

It's even okay to trust in Him.

But you Gentiles, if you want to be fully accepted as God's people, well, then you need to be circumcised as well. But as I said two weeks ago, to add to the Gospel is actually to subtract from it because you're saying Jesus isn't enough.

[3 : 20] And Paul says, this is evil because it destroys faith. It turns the people away from trusting Jesus and trust into trusting in their own work and putting their confidence in it.

Paul says in verse 3 that this is wrong because those who are saved are the ones who glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh. Paul says in a twist of words that they are the ones who are truly circumcised, not these mutilators.

They are the ones who have truly believed the Gospel and therefore worship God by the Spirit. Now in case you think that Paul is only saying this because he's envious, you know, he hasn't got anything to compare with these guys.

Well, Paul says that if boasting is what is called for, then I've got actually more to boast about than them. And so in verse 5, he rattles off a list of Jewish achievements, as it were.

So he says that not only is he circumcised like those Judaizers, but on the eighth day, as the law required. He's from the tribe of Benjamin, the one of only two left in the southern kingdom.

[4 : 27] So, you know, people who remained pure during the exile. So his pedigree was second to none. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews. But he was also faultless in conduct through his life.

He was a Pharisee, an expert of the law. But he was also, before becoming a Christian, a persecutor of the church. And I take that to be, that was to show his zeal for keeping the Jewish people pure, right, by persecuting and eradicating those who had turned to Christ.

And then finally, he says outwardly, he observed the law to a faultless T. He says in terms of righteousness of the law, faultless. So if I can put up a slide, oh, it's already up there, yep.

If you put the Judaizers and their achievements in one column on the left, and then you put Paul's in the other, well, the question is, who do you think we have as the winner? Well, Paul says very clearly, the winner is Paul.

They have nothing on me, Paul says, so don't listen to them. Now to be sure, Paul knew these Judaizers well because he was just like them.

[5 : 37] He used to put his confidence in the flesh and with a fanatical zeal to match. And we've all witnessed that kind of zeal, haven't we? Athletes who torture their bodies just to get to the top of their sport.

People who go all out to climb the corporate ladder, like one of my former colleagues who once boasted to me that he had gone 72 hours without sleep just so he could get a deal done.

Well, Paul had this same zeal. Just look how he persecuted the church, if you read Acts. He thought he was doing God's work, so he was traveling up and down Palestine, going from house to house, it says in Acts chapter 8 and verse 3, and dragging both men and women into prison.

But everything changed for Paul when he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. There, in that instant, Paul realized the futility of his life's work. What he thought was profit to him was actually loss or worthless.

It wasn't, well done, my faithful servant, that Paul heard from Jesus. No, what he heard was, so, so, why are you persecuting me? It's like the sad stories you see on the TV sometimes of pensioners who painstakingly invest all their life savings into an investment scheme, you've seen those, haven't you?

[6 : 56] Only to find out at the end that it was for nothing. Why? Because the financial advisors swindled them and told them to put their money into what is a pyramid scheme. Well, thankfully for Paul, even though he made that mistake, all was not lost for him because he found Christ instead.

God gave him a way to exchange something that was worthless for something or someone of infinite value. And so, if you look with me at verses 7 and 8, Paul says this, Notice how Paul actually widens his point.

So, he's not just saying that the things he used to strive for are a loss. No, he's saying everything, everything, all things, everything under the sun was. When compared to Jesus, all things are lost. When compared to knowing Christ, all things are worthless. The teacher in Ecclesiastes pretty much said the same things in the Old Testament because he realized how futile our own work is. We heard a snippet of that today in our reading, but let me just repeat to you verse 11 of chapter 2. And I've got the words on the screen. This is what he said, Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

[8 : 33] Nothing was gained under the sun. And I think deep down, we know this to be true, don't we? That without Christ, whatever we achieve really has no lasting value.

And so, when Paul finally meets Jesus, this gaping void in his life, which he's been trying to fill all his life with his own achievements, suddenly gets filled. And it gets filled to overflowing.

And so, that's why Paul is able to say that compared to Christ, nothing else stacks up for him anymore. In fact, the word that Paul uses in verse 8 is a very strong word. He says, I consider them garbage or rubbish or dung.

Now, if he was today using today's vernacular, he would be using the S-H-I-T word. Whatever the world may count as profit, it's S-H-I-T compared to knowing Christ.

And so, if I continue my column illustration, hopefully we haven't got to that yet. Yep, we can go to that now, Ross. What Paul is doing is putting a big fat line through his achievements and instead, having Christ.

[9 : 45] But note, he's not just adding Christ as one more thing into his plus column. And he's not even reducing the value of all the other things and having Christ as the biggest plus, like this next slide.

No, everything else is lost. It's a red line. Because if anything else is on that list, then he's putting confidence in something other than Christ.

Instead, Paul wants only this, in verse 9 he says, to be found in Christ, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

You see, Paul realizes that he really can't trust himself. Whatever achievements or good works he's done, they will not withstand the scrutiny of God.

Only what Christ has done will stand the test of time. And so Paul wants to put his trust fully in Jesus because Jesus is the only security he can rely on. So friends, let me ask you this question.

[10 : 50] What are you relying on for God's approval? Are you building a sort of spiritual CV of your good works, of your campaigning for this cause or that cause or social justice, whatever?

Are you looking at your prayer life or your Bible reading as means of convincing yourself that somehow you're good and you deserve God's approval? Or are you relying solely on the work of God, the work of Christ on the cross?

You see, Christ's righteousness is like a sumptuous feast like this one on the next slide. I'm sure some of you have been to buffets like that. All the work has already been done when you turn up to these things.

And the only thing you need to do to enjoy is to come and eat. Well, the equivalent of eating for the Christian is faith. To trust is to feast.

Trust and know Jesus and you feed on him. That's the only way to satisfy your hunger for significance and your thirst for acceptance. Feed on Christ.

[11 : 56] Trust in him. So friends, if any of you have not done so today, I ask you, come to Jesus, feed on him, trust in him, and experience the surpassing worth of knowing Christ.

Now, the next question I want to then ask is, why is knowing Christ such a thing of surpassing worth? Well, Paul elaborates in verse 10 and 11 on that.

Because Paul says that to know Christ is to know, if you look with me, the power of his resurrection. One day, those of us who trust in Jesus will rise again from death, just like Jesus.

That's God's promise. But knowing Christ gives us access to that power now by the Spirit who lives in us. But I want you to notice what the power is for.

It leads, it's to lead a life worthy of the gospel, standing firm in it, putting others before us, being humble, putting our confidence in Christ, not ourselves.

[12 : 58] In other words, it's leading a life of death, of suffering. So Paul puts it like this in verse 10, I want to know Christ, yes, to know the power of his suffering, and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.

and somehow attaining to the resurrection from the dead. We're to become like him in his death, leading a life of self-denial and perseverance.

So this power of the resurrection is not for us to live a life of comfort or easy victory. No, it's so that we can live a life of patience and suffering. And it all sounds really daunting when you think about it, but if we're willing to live like that, then what we gain is the joy and the privilege of knowing Christ.

You see, you've heard people say that the people best able to understand cancer sufferers are who? Those who have themselves gone through cancer. I became to appreciate my mom and dad a bit more when I became a parent and to know the kind of suffering they went through.

Not that my children make me suffer, but that's the same with Jesus because how can we truly understand Jesus unless we understand his humble and sacrificial character and how can we understand that character unless we too experience it ourselves even if in just a small way.

[14 : 27] And so all these trials and challenges in life, they're really opportunities for us to know Christ that God given to us so that we might know Christ, that we might appreciate more deeply the

power of his resurrection.

And friends, let me just, it's obvious when I say it, but let me say this, there is no resurrection without death, is there? And so if we never die to ourselves, take up the cross as Jesus says, and become like him in his death, then the experience of the power of his resurrection will elude us. So brothers and sisters, if life is tough for you at the moment, then take heart because in amongst all that difficulty, there is possibly the joy of knowing Christ, of participating in his suffering. Now up to now, Paul seems so convincing that we might just think, oh, Paul's already done all this, you know, he's this great sufferer, person that has, you know, counted everything lost for Christ. But as we move to the next section, I think Paul is quick to point out that actually it's not so. He believes all these things, but he's not there yet. Instead, what he's focused on, he says, is to forget all that's past in order to win the prize.

[15:42] So that's our sort of second bold section. So verse 12 continues like this, not that I already, I have already obtained all this or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

Now what Paul hopes to obtain in the end is of course the resurrection from the dead. is talked about that in verse 11 already. Then he will fully know Christ, finally. But Paul also knows that in terms of becoming like Christ in his death, he hasn't arrived yet, and so he can't rest on his laurels. This life of humility and self-denial is an ongoing task. God is still completing the work that he began in Paul. And so he continues, brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it, but one thing I do, forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which Christ or God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. And this to me actually is the mark of Paul's maturity and also of his humility. The image he paints here is one of a competitor in a race, and if you've done any racing before, you know that when you race, you need to keep straining forward until you hit the finishing line, don't you? Until you've won. Don't be like this guy on this video clip, hopefully it works. Let's play it. Don't be like this guy. Now we shake our heads.

[17:13] I've never been in that situation of being ahead in the race, so it never bothers me, but that is the danger that we can have in the Christian life too, can't we?

And I have to say, especially for those of us who think we are mature. In fact, I think it's a risk peculiar to those who think they are mature. Imagine a Christian, for example, who gives up a lucrative career in corporate finance in order to be a pastor.

He does that because he no longer wants to put his confidence in career success. Well, good on him. And at first, he really grows in his faith, but then after a few years when he's been a pastor for a while, what he starts to do is put his confidence in ministry success.

He looks back and he remembers and takes satisfaction in how many people he's converted. Each week, he looks out from the pulpit, he takes satisfaction in all the people who are at his church, how they're there because of his godly maturity.

Now, that may not be your situation, but it's easy to get into that kind of situation, isn't it? When we've been a Christian for a while, to fall back into pride, to put our confidence in the flesh.

[18:29] But Paul's warning in verse 15 is this, all of us who are mature, so if that's what you think you are, take note, all of us who are mature should take such a view of things, and if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you.

Now, what's this view Paul talks about? It's the view of actually forgetting the past and keeping our eye on the price. It means not building a spiritual CV and gloating over how we've done so much for God, or how we've grown so much, not looking back over our past maturity and taking pride in it. Instead, our eyes are focused on Jesus, knowing what he's like more and more, and appreciating more and more what he's done for us. That's why Paul says in verse 16, only let us live up to what we have already attained.

Take hold of that which Christ took hold of you. The emphasis is on what Christ has done. Live our lives in light of what he has done on the cross. Live our lives worthy of the gospel. And then by way of encouragement, in verse 17, Paul then now points to others who live like that.

And he asks the Philippians and asked to follow the example. Join with others, he says in verse 17. Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do.

[19 : 58] So keep your eyes on Jesus, but also keep your eyes on those who do. I have to say that just by being a Christian for a long time doesn't make us mature.

Maturity doesn't come just with years. rather it comes with a life of humility. And if you look around, these people are not actually hard to spot in church, and we have many at Holy Trinity.

They're the ones where their years as a Christian have not made them proud. They've not made them impatient with the lack of faith of others. Instead, you find them always gracious and humble and gentle.

Friends, if you see these people in church, befriend them. learn from them and follow their way of life. On the other hand, Paul says that there are others, and I take it when you read verse 18, judging from his tears, that these must be former Christians or else people still within the church community, and yet their lives betray them as enemies of the cross.

Paul says that their destiny is in their destruction, their God is in their stomachs, and their glory is their shame. Their mind, and this is the key phrase, is set on earthly things.

[21 : 17] Now, Paul doesn't give us any details of what they've done, so we don't really know, but what I picture is people who are outwardly pious, perhaps, respectable, coming to church every week, doing and saying the right things, and yet inwardly, it's their selfish desires that motivates them.

That's why Paul says they're trying to satisfy their stomachs. And what does Paul say is their problem? is that their focus is on the wrong place. It's on earthly things, seeking reward on earth, seeking glory in this life.

Instead, Paul says our focus should be in heaven, verse 20. Our citizenship is in heaven, that's where we belong, that's where we're headed, and that's where our salvation comes from.

For he says we eagerly await our Savior Jesus Christ from there, who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies to that, so that they will be like his glorious body.

When we put our confidence in the flesh, then we are fixed on things on earth, we're fixed on earthly things, and that's the wrong place to be focused on, because our true reward lies in heaven.

[22 : 27] Don't fall for that mistake, Paul says, because it will only end in shame and destruction. Just like the writer to the Ecclesiastes says, when your life is over, it's over, there's nothing to show for it, whatever you've built for this life, that's it, it's gone, it's destroyed.

But when Jesus comes and we have been patiently waiting for him, then our lowly bodies will be transformed into a glorious body. We will have glory if our eyes are fixed in heaven.

God will be to verse 1. Some of you might have been wondering how I skipped over it, how I could ever do that, but I wanted to cover the entire passage so that it becomes clear when Paul says rejoice in the Lord what that means.

Now when I was young I always thought that to rejoice in the Lord meant I was just singing happy clappy songs about Jesus. There you go.

And there's nothing wrong with singing those songs. In fact that's straight from the Bible. Next week we'll look at it. And I think we're going to be singing a happy song at the end today called Happy Day as well. So there's nothing wrong with singing those songs.

[23 : 38] But I think when Paul says to rejoice in the Lord what he means is that we are to find our joy in the Lord at all times whether good or bad. When things go well find joy in the Lord not in the things that we've achieved or earthly things.

When things are tough we are to also find satisfaction in him. Don't let our suffering cause us to lose sight of the prize for which Christ is calling us heavenward.

We already have that. And so Paul says when your life's up or it's down rejoice in the Lord. Turn your focus back on the Lord and find joy and satisfaction in him.

Now there's more for me to say on this but I'm going to leave it for next week because there's more of that but Paul talks about in chapter 4 rejoicing in the Lord. So what I thought we'll do then is close by doing just that to rejoice in the Lord and what we'll do is just break up into small groups again maybe threes or fours and we're going to pray together and not just thank God but actually to rejoice in the Lord for those things.

Turn our focus back away from those good things back onto the Lord. Now you don't have to pray out loud if you're not comfortable or you're not a Christian or just visiting. Just join a group anyway and then after a couple of minutes I'll get Marcus to come back up to continue our meeting.