

Eternal Profit and Loss

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[0 : 0 0] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 9th of January 2005. The preacher is Warwick Grant.

His sermon is entitled Eternal Profit and Loss and is based on Philippians chapter 3 verses 1 to 11.

Well I encourage you to have the passage from Paul's letters of the Philippians open in front of you as we'll be looking at that and asking God what he might say to us through that. It's on page 954 of the Black Pew Bibles, page 954.

And it's the first 11 verses of Philippians chapter 3. May I begin by taking this opportunity to thank you for your prayers for my wife, Olive, who took ill last weekend.

And for those of you who don't know Olive or who weren't here last week, she was rushed to hospital with suspected apendicitis, which is in fact what she had. And she successfully underwent surgery last Sunday morning.

[1 : 1 0] In fact the operation occurred just at the very time that this service was on last Sunday. And when I caught up with her after the surgery I said I thought she was very clever to get sick on Sunday morning because it's a good way to get a lot of people to pray for you.

So if you're going to get sick, Sunday morning is a great time to do it. I can thoroughly recommend it. But all jokes aside, please keep praying for her as she's still in quite a bit of discomfort and she's still recovering.

I'd appreciate your prayers. But an added complication in all that was that we're expecting our second child and Olive is in fact 20 weeks pregnant. And our obstetrician was quite concerned that the surgery for removing her appendix could have an effect on the pregnancy.

In fact he said to me by telephone before the operation, he said there's actually a 1 in 200 chance that the baby could be lost. But God was kind to us and all reports are that the baby was completely unaffected by the surgery.

But what if we'd lost the baby? What then? In the first verse of our reading today, the Apostle Paul exhorts us to rejoice in the Lord.

[2 : 3 2] If we'd lost our child, could we still rejoice in the Lord? Well, yeah, we could. Or what if something worse had happened?

What if Olive had died? Would I still be able to rejoice in the Lord? Yeah, I could. What about in the light of everything that's been happening in our world, particularly what happened on Boxing Day?

Can we still rejoice in the Lord in the aftermath of the massive earthquake and tsunami that has killed thousands of people and devastated the lives of thousands more? Well, yeah, we can still rejoice in the Lord.

In fact, Paul is at pains in this passage to say that there really is nothing else in which we can rejoice except the Lord. How is it then that we can rejoice in the Lord in the face of everything else that is going on around us, whether in our own lives personally or in our world on an international scale, politically, natural disaster-wise, whatever.

How can we rejoice in the Lord? Paul continues in verse 1 with these words, To write the same things to you is not troublesome to me, but for you it is a safeguard.

[3 : 58] Let's look at these verses and see what God would say to us. It seems that Paul is saying, Look, I'm going to repeat something I've already told you now. Maybe he wrote a previous letter, and he's saying, Look, I'm going to reiterate something I've already told you, or else maybe when he was present in Philippi, he told them something.

Verse 2. Beware of the dogs. Beware of the evil workers. Beware of those who mutilate the flesh. Well, that's a change of tone, isn't there? It seems that Paul was just about to finish the letter in verse 1.

You'll notice it starts with the word finally. And then he got news perhaps of something which he was upset about, that he'd heard about. And he thought, Gosh, we've got to write some more to warn people about this erroneous teaching that has been going around.

So he changes his tone quite dramatically. Who are these dogs that he refers to? Well, he has in mind one particular hostile group. And he is so affronted by them, he calls them dogs.

Now, Jewish people regard dogs as, and I quote, the most despised, insolent, and miserable of creatures and unclean as well. Apologies to all the dog lovers amongst you.

[5 : 15] Strangely enough, the term dogs was used by Jewish people in those days of non-Jewish, of Gentile people. But here Paul is turning things around and actually using them to describe Jewish emissaries who'd become Christians but were actually misrepresenting the Christian gospel.

Okay, so get this, this is Jewish people who have accepted Christ, they've become Christians but in their own evangelism they're actually misrepresenting what Christianity is all about.

How are they misrepresenting it for Paul to get so annoyed with them and so cross? Well, you will know that the special badge for a Jewish man in terms of his relationship with God was that of circumcision.

And that was a thing that was instigated here. You can read about it in Genesis chapter 17. A Jewish man, as a sign of his relationship with God would be circumcised. And it seems that there were some Jewish people here who were saying, if you want to be a real Christian you need to be circumcised.

Saying to be a Christian, to follow Jesus you must undergo circumcision. So they were saying it wasn't actually simply sufficient to trust in Jesus and accept his love and his death for you on the cross but it was also absolutely necessary that Christians underwent the right of circumcision as well.

[6 : 34] Of course we're talking about the meaning here. And Paul is saying that's nonsense. That is rubbish. That is why he's so annoyed. See we need to realise that circumcision, which was an entirely appropriate and good thing an odd thing you'd have to admit given by God to indicate the relationship of a Jewish man with God was actually an outward sign of something deeper on the inside of a Jewish man's relationship with God.

The writer of the book of Deuteronomy actually says in chapter 10 circumcised then the foreskin of your heart. So the outward sign of circumcision was actually symbolising something deeper something spiritual that was going on inside of a Jewish man in his relationship with God.

It's not simply that being circumcised having that particular surgery if you like was adequate and made you therefore acceptable to God. In verse 3 Paul actually goes on to enunciate three aspects of what it means to be a true follower of Jesus to be what he describes as the true circumcision.

The first one is those who worship in the spirit of God. Our worship may be well organised aesthetically pleasing and involving many of the creative arts but if it's not enabled by God's spirit and from our heart it's not the worship that God wants.

And of course worship is more than just what we do at 10 o'clock on a Sunday morning it's a 24-7 thing our whole lives are an act of worship. There are those who are circumcised sorry those who are the circumcision boast in Christ Jesus that is they realise that it's only he who's able to make them acceptable to God there's nothing that they can do in and of themselves to achieve that.

[8 : 24] And that's the gist also of the last phrase in verse 3 to have no confidence in the flesh here the flesh means our frail human nature in all its weakness. No, there's nothing in and of ourselves that we can do to make ourselves acceptable to God.

We need him to do something. Jump back to verse 2 for a second you'll see that Paul describes those Christians who insist on new converts undergoing the right of circumcision as absolutely necessary for their salvation.

he describes them as mutilators of the flesh. He's saying they're not circumcised they've just simply mutilated their body that's just simply an outward empty superficial thing. They've forgotten the inner meaning of that right.

Paul's at pains to say there is nothing we can do circumcision or anything else to earn God's approval. He actually goes on in verses 5 and 6 in a remarkable personal confession to say that if being Jewish is what you have to do to get God's approval he probably has actually done everything that needs to be done.

Let's have a look at verses 5 and 6. It almost sounds like it is showing off. If anyone has reason to be confident in the flesh I have more. Circumcised on the eighth day a member of the people of Israel of the tribe of Benjamin a Hebrew born of Hebrews as to the law a Pharisee as to zeal a persecutor of the church as to righteousness under the law blameless.

[9 : 55] He's sort of strutting his Jewish pedigree here saying look can you find a better Jew in terms of being legalistically keeping all the Jewish trappings and requirements of the law?

He was punctilious in his fulfilling of what was required of a Jewish person in Judaism. Okay let's look at that list briefly.

He was circumcised when he was eight days old. That was required when God instigated circumcision. He was a Jew from birth. He was a member of God's chosen people of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin.

This is a fairly small tribe but for various reasons it was regarded with particular esteem. The first king of Israel King Saul was from that very tribe and in fact Paul before he was a Christian his name was in fact Saul.

He describes himself as a Hebrew born of Hebrew parents. His parents were Hebrew and would have been diligent in helping him grow up in the ways of his faith.

[10 : 56] He was also a Pharisee. This is a religious party if you like in Judaism and has been described as the spiritual athletes of Judaism.

They made it their business to keep every little and little dot of the law. Strict religious observance. They believed that in that way they would be acceptable to God.

Paul was in fact Saul as he was then so zealous for his faith that when Christianity was up and coming he persecuted the church. He was keen to see Christians arrested and even killed.

And he says he has every confidence that as far as being righteous in terms of the law he was blameless. He did everything that was required. His Jewish worldview was one we need to understand that said do all this fulfil these requirements and God will accept you.

Religions like this are still around and friends there are even some Christian sects that are around that are like this. The Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses are two that come to mind who require you to do certain things who don't just say rely on Jesus and trust in God for your salvation you need to do this, this, this this and this in order to earn God's approval.

[12 : 14] It doesn't say that in the Bible. Many people even understand the Christian faith as a works type faith. We have to work to earn God's approval. That's a gross misunderstanding of the Bible.

God wants to give us his acceptance and love to just give us righteousness which we'll talk about shortly. Don't get me wrong God's not saying that works are unimportant. In the letter of James James makes it clear that our Christian works, the good things we do in response to what God's done for us indicate and show that our faith is fair dinkum.

This list that Paul has got in verses five and six is a bit like me saying something like and this sounds like I'm showing off but I don't mean to I was brought up going to church every week an Anglican church too.

I sang in the choir I served on the vestry I even played the organ for one year before they kicked me off. I was a youth minister in a couple of Anglican churches I went to an Anglican school I failed year 12 but I shouldn't have mentioned that I studied at Ridley College and I'm an ordained clergyman in the church so God you should accept me that is sort of if we can get into a contemporary sort of feel what we're getting at with what a Jewish person how he approached God in terms of doing things doing things doing things to get God's approval.

Now as it happens all those things that I mentioned about me are true but absolutely none of them count towards what God's done in accepting me God doesn't accept me because of those things I'm made acceptable to God and put right with him simply because of what he has done in sending Jesus to die on the cross to take the penalty for my sinfulness and in doing that and trusting in Jesus and his death for me God gives me his righteousness and purity and goodness takes my sin away gives me his goodness I'm therefore completely acceptable to him well Paul having given this list in verses 5 and 6 goes on in verse 7 to say they're just a loss compared to what Jesus has done for me everything in fact in verse 8 Paul regards as a loss because of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord notice he doesn't say knowing about Jesus Christ but actually knowing him the language is one of intimacy of an intimate friendship of a relationship with Jesus how do we know

[14 : 41] Jesus is he sort of someone we know from a distance or do we know him intimately as our friend as the one who loved us so much that he died for us the one before whom we will all stand as judge Paul mentions that he suffered much loss as he's followed Christ and he may have in mind his own achievements that were just listed in verses 5 and 6 he actually says in verse 8 more than that I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord for his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and I regard them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him the word we translate here as rubbish it sort of sounds sort of fairly palatable but the word in the Greek can actually mean like excrement muck you know what I'm getting at and Paul is actually saying that all that other stuff that he's done is just twaddle muck garbage compared to knowing Christ

Jesus his Lord those things count for nothing what counts is knowing Jesus and trusting in him receiving forgiveness and the assurance of life with him forever as we put our hope in him verse 9 goes on and be found in him not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law but one that comes through faith in Christ the righteousness from God based on faith for the Christian being put right with God being made acceptable to God is not something that we achieve by following a set of rules it comes from simply accepting the gift that God offers to each one of us he offers us like a present his forgiveness and his love and his acceptance and a home in heaven with him forever what do you do with a gift you accept it or you reject it is that a gift that you have accepted about a million years ago I used to work at David Jones it was 20 years ago in fact and I worked in the Manchester department which was in the basement of the little

Bourke Street store in the city and that building was only about four floors high and it was an evening building it was about four floors high and there were stairs that you could actually go up to the fourth floor but there was also a lift and the lift went beyond the fourth floor to actually the roof and you might say why on earth would you want to have a lift going to the roof but on the roof was actually a big work area and that was where a lot of pricing was done before we had barcodes price tags were put on products and things were stored in the sheds before they were brought down to be sold in the store and I used to have my lunch on the roof of David Jones and that was an interesting experience but it just struck me that if I wanted to get to the roof for my lunch it was pointless going by the stairs because they just didn't go that far but the lift got me to the roof and I thought climbing upstairs I mean that's hard work and this is what Paul when he used to be just a Jewish man was on about hard work climbing the stairs getting higher and higher closer to God working working working to try and earn

God's approval however what Jesus says is get into the lift don't have to do anything just walk in walk into me be with me I'll just take you there you'll be acceptable to God as you trust in me he'll take you to the roof so to speak to be acceptable to God pleasing to him you see when God looks at each one of us if you're one person if you're a person who trusts in Jesus as God looks at you this morning he sees a completely totally perfect and acceptable person to him completely righteous no sin at all if you trust in Jesus you are completely righteous in his sight right now now I know you battle with sin and I battle with sin all the time and that's a battle that will go on for the rest of our lives but as far as our standing with God it is assured we are acceptable to him we are righteous before him sitting here right now if we trust in Jesus and friends we're just passing through this life this is not our home our home for the

Christian is in heaven and I and I can stand here at 10 45 that's right 10 45 on Sunday morning the 9th of January 2005 with absolute confidence and say to you I know I'm going to heaven not because of anything I've done but because of what Jesus has done for me made me acceptable to God and I'll be there and if you're there you'll have to put up with me forever this is a wonderful assurance for those who trust in Jesus you can go through this life not on the edge of your seat wondering have I done enough to please God you can know with confidence you are accepted by God despite all your sinfulness and that's a great reassurance for me who battles with sin every day one of my favourite subjects in my theology degree was world religions and in the subject world religions one of the religions we focused on particularly was Islam and as part of our study of Islam we had a visit to the Preston mosque

[20 : 01] Matthew and Penelope might remember that we were in the same occasion four years ago and we actually spent about an hour with the imam of the Preston mosque and we went into his study and this was something that was organised each year by our lecturer he had a good relationship with the imam and I remember we had lots of questions for him and he was very happy to field our questions and one of my student colleagues was quite forthright in his questioning and he said do you know do you really know that you're acceptable to God can you be sure that you'll be in heaven and the imam was a bit speechless and said we don't know how can anyone know how sad is that no the Muslim person has no assurance of salvation I wonder if some of the most frenetic aspects of Islam we read about are people doing incredibly zealous things to try and earn Allah's acceptance by the way

I don't think Allah is the Muslim name for the Christian God I think Allah is something quite different will we come to our final verses for this morning verses 10 and 11 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead do we know the power of Christ's resurrection in our own lives I suspect there could be a whole series of sermons on that topic it is clear from the Bible that when we trust in Jesus we actually come to share in Jesus victory over sin and death which he demonstrated at his resurrection do we as Christians have that confidence of our own resurrection as we trust in Jesus because we actually share in his victory over sin and death we have a life with God which will continue with him forever in heaven are we seeing

Jesus' resurrection power in our own lives as we become more like him and Paul mentions there that we will suffer for being Christians in Australia we don't actually suffer all that much for being Christians maybe cop a bit of abuse in the local club or at work but in some nations being a Christian can be a life threatening thing Paul wrote about in Nigeria a young man who was shot at point blank range because he confessed faith in Christ the scriptures remind us that as the master Jesus suffered so too his followers will suffer verse 11 sounds as if Paul has some doubts about his resurrection he says if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead the sense here isn't that he doubts it but he doubts the events leading up to it he's not sure what's going to happen you need to remember that this letter was probably written from prison in

Rome he was unsure if his death was imminent was he going to be executed would he die many years time as an old man he was unsure of his immediate future so his word somehow is more talking about his circumstances he is not for one moment doubting his resurrection so as we conclude what about us where is our confidence placed do we hope that our acceptance by God will come through the things that we've achieved or is our confidence where it needs to be placed in God's gracious provision of Jesus Christ and his death for us on the cross you might say oh but my faith is so weak at times I think the issue isn't so much how much faith you have the quantity of your faith if you like but where is it placed large or small where is it placed that's what's important you can have a weak faith placed in Jesus that's good you've got faith in

Jesus and that faith can grow as you trust in him but if it's placed in yourself you need to be concerned if it's placed in Jesus rejoice your faith is in the right place so if Oliver and I had lost our unborn child could we still rejoice in the Lord well yeah we could what if something else happened what if my son died tragically somehow could I rejoice in the Lord then yeah I could what if I lost everything I possessed in a house fire could I rejoice in the Lord then what if I became paralyzed unable to walk confined to a bed for the rest of my life what if I was diagnosed with a chronicle or even a terminal illness could I rejoice in the Lord then yeah I could none of those things would be easy they'd be terrible they'd be awful and I wouldn't wish them on anyone but I still could rejoice in the

[25 : 12] Lord in fact he is the only one in whom I can rejoice because of a certain future hope he has given me as I trust in Jesus and this hope can be yours too if you put your faith and trust in him many of the things I mentioned in that list people we love our health the things we possess they won't last only the Lord Jesus and those who put their faith and trust in him will last and live with him forever finally my brothers and sisters rejoice in the Lord Amen I keep have o