

Losing All For Greater Gain

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 February 2016

Preacher: Rev. James Maciver

[0 : 00] Let's turn our minds this evening to Philippians chapter 3 and we're going to consider verses 7 to 11. Philippians 3 at verse 7, 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. And so on down to verse 11 if we have time to go through it.

We'll take most of it at least as far as we can this evening. To look at Paul's testimony here, this part of it, where he reflects upon what it really means, what you would say, what it means to him to be a Christian.

And what it means to him to have Christ as his saviour. And of course he does it in this way that's so familiar to us all from knowing this passage so well. He sets it out in terms of profit and loss or loss and profit, loss and gain.

You all I'm sure know of Jim Elliot's famous statement. It's become famous when he was to go on the mission and being actually apprised of how dangerous that was going to be.

[1 : 16] When he said, he is no fool who gives away what he cannot keep in order to gain what he cannot lose.

And that's really the essence of what Paul is saying here. Whether Elliot was thinking of these words or not, we're not sure. But certainly that's really a summary you could say of what Paul is saying here.

He's not been a fool to give away the things that he had by way of gain as a Pharisee, as someone who was so vigorously keeping the law and so minutely keeping the terms of the law as far as he could.

He is no fool who gives away that, what he couldn't keep anyway, in order to gain this Christ and his righteousness which he could not lose.

Let's look at two things. The surpassing worth, as he says here, of knowing Christ. And secondly, the spiritual wealth from gaining Christ.

[2 : 28] The surpassing worth of knowing him and the spiritual wealth that we have when we've gained him. When we've come to have him as our great treasure.

You notice how Paul says here, Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. What does he mean by whatever gain I had? Well, you have to reflect on what he was saying up to now. Where he says that he himself had all this reason to have confidence in the flesh. That's to say in his own abilities, in his own formidable abilities.

Because he says there even in regard to his background, not only was he a true Israelite of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, as touching the law of Pharisee, one of those zealous, that zealous section of Judaism that so zealously kept the law, persecuted of the church, but then he says, As to the righteousness under the law, blameless.

Now he's not suggesting that he was sinless. What he's saying is, Here was what I had to gain. Not only did I have my background, and what I could do in terms of my career, and progress within my Phariseeism, towards greater levels of achievement, or of status within these people, but the gain that he's speaking of especially, is what he might have thought then was gain, by keeping the law in his own efforts, by his own zeal, with his own minute attention to detail.

[4 : 06] That's what he was saying, in terms of putting it in terms of gain. What he thought of was real gain. What he thought of was really giving him a status with God.

What he was convinced of, was really giving him, whoever else did or didn't have this, this Saul of Tarsus was absolutely convinced, that in terms of his standing before God, he could not be blamed.

God had to accept him. God could only have regarded him surely, as righteous in his sight. But he said, whatever gain I had, I counted as loss, for the sake of Christ.

Christ, this great achiever, this man you could say, was at the pinnacle of human achievement, morally and spiritually speaking. You would search throughout the world, in those days of Saul of Tarsus, to find a more perfect man, in terms of his own effort, his own sense of obedience to the law of God.

You would not find someone, who was above him in that sense. And yet, that perfect man came, to see when God came into his life, when Christ met him, when he actually took hold of him, and opened his mind to the truth.

[5 : 35] No longer righteous. No longer God's choice person. But a miserable, lost, unrighteous sinner. Happy now, pleased now, to give away, what had been gained to him, as he saw it up to then.

In order to have Christ, as we'll see in a minute, in order to gain Christ. The gain of keeping the law, the gain of his own efforts, the gain of his own, immaculate self-righteousness, if we can put it that way.

He's giving that away. He's willingly giving it away. This he says, I counted as loss. I gave it away most willingly, in order that I might, do it for Christ.

This is for the sake, of Christ. But then he goes on. Indeed, I am counting everything as loss, because of the surpassing worth, of knowing Christ as my Lord.

And in fact, he goes further and says, yes, in fact, I counted, as I've suffered the loss of all things, I count them as rubbish, or worthless refuse. It's difficult to get a word that describes that in translation, but that's essentially what he means.

[6 : 48] Now, of course, he's not despising his upbringing. He's not despising the word of God that he had, and his Old Testament understanding, and upbringing of it.

He's not despising that itself. What he's saying is, my achievements, my righteousness, as I thought it, I'm counting that now as worthless rubbish. I can see that before God, it just doesn't stand up to scrutiny at all.

But you see, as you say, as you see this word, I count everything. That's going back to the moment of realization. I counted, rather, at the moment of realization.

The moment when Jesus came into his life powerfully. That's when he began to see things as they really were. So now he's saying, as he's giving his testimony, I then counted all things but loss.

But now he's also saying, I am counting now all things but loss. That's how it is surely for ourselves too. It is good, and it is worthwhile, and it is necessary at times to go back and reflect upon your coming to know the Lord, however that was, and of course, it will not very often perhaps be, or in most cases at least be, the kind of dramatic thing that it was for Saul of Tarsus.

[8 : 14] For some, for many, it will be a very quiet change from death to life. Maybe even, like myself, not able to put your finger on the day or even the week.

As some others can. But what is important is that we're able to say, well, I can look back and say, I came to count this as loss for Christ, but I'm also counting it now.

It's what he is to us today that really matters, isn't it? It's not that we can say, there was a day when Christ came into my life and when that happened, whether it was on a specific 24-hour day or over a period of time, I then counted all things but loss for him, for his sake, so that I could have himself. But now, as I reflect upon things, as I look at myself now, I'm still of that opinion. I haven't changed my mind. I've not regretted the counting that I did count in those days all things but loss.

I'm still counting it but loss. I'm still looking at the balance books, Paul is saying, and as I see my own achievements and put them on one side, I'm still saying, that's loss.

[9 : 31] God's putting a stroke through that and so am I, he's saying. And I'm counting it as loss for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ.

Now you might say, that's important to come to realize and to come to make that confession on a daily basis as far as possible. We come to do it also as we approach the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper, as it presents Christ and his death to us and these elements, so we relate to that. We relate to that by faith, by love, by our hope, by our trust being in him.

And as you do so, you assess your life, you assess where you are now. You don't just look back and say, I realized that I came to know Christ X number of years ago or months ago or whatever and that I counted all things but loss for him then.

You say, well, I'm coming to the Lord's table and that's still what he means to me even perhaps more than ever before. I am counting all things as worthless compared to him.

[10:44] How could he say such a strong, how could he use such a strong term as worthless rubbish? How could he speak of his own past achievements as he saw them?

Because, in a sense, they're admirable, not of course when you think of them in terms of God's view of them or God's estimation of them, but they're admirable in the sense that he was committed to this word of God, this law of God and he was convinced of God as the one he was answerable to. How could he call it worthless rubbish? Well, you have to take the whole thing, of course, because he's saying, I count everything as loss and I count them even as worthless rubbish for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ as my Lord.

That's the key to it. He can say, even of the best human achievements without Christ, that they are, in fact, in God's eyes as refuse compared to the value, to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord as my Lord.

And that's surely something we all follow and if we're able to follow that then our place is at the Lord's table unquestionably.

[12:08] If we are able to say tonight, I know, it's my conviction, I'm sure of this, that supposing the whole world were to be offered to me and all its riches and all its achievements and all the status that that would give me in the opinion of human beings, if that was the alternative to having Christ, I know what I would choose.

I would choose the surpassing worth of knowing Christ and put everything else aside. Isn't that how it is?

Isn't that what you think? Isn't that what He means to you? Isn't that why you should be at the Lord's table? Not that you deserve it any more than any of us does.

Not that we've gained it ourselves by our own achievements or our worth before God. It's all because of Him. That's why He's saying there, I count it as loss for the sake of Christ.

It's to do with who He is and what we have in Him. And it's the surpassing worth. You remember how Hebrews 11, verse 26, speaks about Moses who through faith is spoken of there as having done things and having thought in a certain way and considered himself no longer.

[13:36] He was going to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to suffer affliction with the people of God. Why did he do that? Because he considered he considered that the sufferings involved in following Christ far surpassed all the treasures of Egypt.

Considering that everything to do with being one of God's people as He knew them then as slaves in Egypt that it was, as Paul is saying here, the surpassing worth of having that compared to everything Egypt had to offer.

He esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt. That's exactly what Paul is saying. The surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus and you see he's giving him the whole title Christ Jesus my Lord and that my is so precious but so too is the word Lord because the way that Paul values Jesus is not saying well I value Jesus but it's not including his Lordship it's not including him having this total control and absolute dominance in my life.

Paul won't have that. Paul won't separate the Lordship of Christ and what it means over every facet of his life from having him as a saviour who is the forgiver of his sins.

what he's saying here is what is surpassing in worth is Christ in his entirety including that he is my Lord including the fact that he rules everything in my life and everything outside it.

[15:30] That's the surpassing worth that he's speaking about. The surpassing worth of knowing Christ of having a personal knowledge and a personal relationship with Christ because that's what he's saying isn't the surpassing worth of knowing Christ of knowing him which means this personal intimate relationship this one to one relationship he has with him even though he belongs to the whole body of God's people what he's telling us here is his personal relation with the Lord and it's in that personal relationship that he's saying Christ is surpassing worth to me worth beyond everything else I can think of even the achievements that I once was able to achieve and then he says that that I might be found in him that I might gain him now it's interesting that these verses if you notice verses 8 and 10 the word well it's in order that in verse 8 in order that

I may gain Christ but in verse 10 it's the same thing really saying that or in order that I may know him and the power of his resurrection now sometimes we take verse 10 perhaps and we just pick it out of the context and we say that this is something that I will seek to have every day this is the

objective of my life to know him and to know the power of his resurrection and there's nothing wrong actually in thinking that of course but you have to keep the context and the string of the verses as they are as Paul has strung them together and what he's really saying with each of these that or in order that that flows from his consideration of all things but loss and the surpassing worth of knowing Christ in other words he's saying why do I consider that the loss of all things is worthwhile why do I consider that they're not worth comparing to the surpassing worth of Christ why did I do this and why do I still do this why did I count all things but loss why do I go on counting all things but loss for the surpassing worth of Christ what does that mean what does that include well he says this is why I did it and this is why I do it so that I may gain Christ so that I may know him and the power of his resurrection that's why I put all of the other things behind me that I once thought were really important in terms of my achievement that's why I'm glad to now see them at loss

I do that so that instead I might know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his suffering and so on it's important we get these connections so let's look secondly at the spiritual wealth that we have from gaining Christ so that in order that I may gain Christ and that's the first thing that strikes you it's Christ himself he's going on to speak about very important very precious things righteousness becoming like Christ the power of his resurrection but he begins with this that this is why I count all things but loss as I counted them so that I may gain Christ that instead of the gain of achieving things by the law and my own efforts I will gain Christ in other words he's really concerned to show the

Philippians that it's Christ himself that comes with everything else in him this person the whole Christ the whole Jesus the whole Lord you know it's only when you possess himself that you possess the other things that he mentions there and in the rest of his epistles you don't have righteousness without himself you don't have God's approval without Jesus himself but when you have him everything else comes with him that's the wonderful thing about God's salvation there isn't a shred of your own effort has gone towards obtaining and procuring the things that you need before God they are all in Christ they are already obtained by his work and when you come to remember him in his death remembering the death he died as that set out in the sacrament you realize that the whole

Christ is yours and that everything you need comes in him and with him so that I might have that I might gain Christ and be found in him and one of the best ways of illustrating what that means is to go back in the Old Testament to the time of the flood and Noah's day and look at that symbolical event of the ark and the flood where you find those in the ark held up above the waters because of the ark where the rest of the world perishes in the flood and the Bible uses that as an illustration of God's salvation it is those in the ark who are saved from the deluge that overwhelms the rest of mankind they are safe because they're in the ark they're upheld above the deluge because they are in this vessel as God has appointed to be built and built exactly to his specifications and sealed by his order and so when you come to

[21 : 50] Christ that's exactly what you've got you have the means in the person of Christ in which you are secure so that none of the deluge of God's wrath will come ever to touch you however near it might come to you however much you may be aware of it in your coming to Christ and even afterwards when you think about sin and when the gravity of sin comes to be more and more impressed on your mind and you realize that for that sin the wrath of God is appropriate against you but it's not appropriate in the sense in which it will now claim you because you're in Christ and because you're in him you're absolutely secure and what Paul is saying is I'm counting all things but loss so that I might be found in him that I might gain him and be found in him when I was trying myself and had this great personal achievement of being blameless before the law

I had no security I wasn't any safer then than the worst sinner in the world the wrath of God was against me and would have claimed me but for Christ that I might be found in him and he goes on 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 now you know that righteousness is the standard of life or of behavior that the law of God sets out which Paul thought he could do by himself but of course he came to realize that that was impossible because of his sinfulness his fallenness and he said I don't have a righteousness of my own a righteousness that I can call my own because of the law through the law by the law itself it's impossible but in

Christ and this is why I count all things but laws that I might have the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ the righteousness that God in him has provided that I have through faith in

him you see faith as you well know receives Christ and when you receive Christ by faith you receive this righteousness that God requires of us and it's not a righteousness that is anything other than the righteousness that comes in relation to the law that's the wonderful thing about it God is saying here is my law if you keep that perfectly without sinning the whole of your life I'll approve of you and here is Paul saying that's just completely impossible as I found out but when God is saying here is my son here is

Jesus Christ and in him there is this righteousness that I require of you what it's really saying is the righteousness my law requires was fulfilled by him he kept the law he met the terms of the law he died the death the law itself demanded for its brokenness by us when you receive Christ you receive this righteousness of God the righteousness God has provided and the righteousness God demands of us but it's the same righteousness that his law sets forth that Christ himself achieved the righteousness which we have through faith in Christ you do meet the standard that God requires except it's through faith in Christ not by your own keeping of the law and it's through faith and by faith that's the vital connection the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ that depends on faith or that comes to us by the exercise of faith when you trust in

Christ everything is brought into your possession that you require to make you acceptable with God and you don't need to fear coming to the Lord's table that you still find certain sins in your life you lament the fact you're sorry over the fact that doesn't mean God doesn't approve of you when you're in Christ when your faith looks to him to be your righteousness when you know that God is perfectly pleased with him with the righteousness that is in them and therefore with those who are in him and have his righteousness imputed to them put on their record you can come to the Lord's table and say Lord I know that I'm still guilty of some sins against you every day that I need your pardon that I need your cleansing that I need your correction that I need you to bring me back from my failures that I need all of this still in my life that I'm far from perfect but Lord I take you at your word that in

[27 : 44] Christ I am approved of by you and I can come to your table and remember what you've done knowing that that is the case if you are coming to the Lord's table or if you're planning on coming to the Lord's table in your own strength with a sense of your own achievement stay away from it it's not for you if you're coming to the Lord's table with your faith in Christ and knowing that you have still many failures to confess come to it that's where you should be it's for your strengthening it's for increasing your faith the weak faith you complain of being weak but that's what God's means of grace are for including the sacraments to nourish believers in their faith so it's that I might be found in him that I might gain himself firstly then be found in him and then have this righteousness that comes from God but he goes on I'm just going to skip over this although it deserves a much more detailed treatment he's not finished with that he goes on to say this also is why

I count all things but loss so that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share in his sufferings and so on well know him we've said is knowing him in terms of being united to him in terms of this personal relation with whatever people think of you in the world if you're walking along the road the road and even if it's more than just thinking your mind and having fellowship with Christ we knew of many Christians in the past and probably still do who even openly when they're out in the open talk to the Lord they talk to the Lord as if he's right beside them they're not ashamed that people hear them talking and if you were to ask them or if the world was to ask them are you talking to yourself what are you doing who are you talking to and say well I'm talking to God of course they would think that you're off your head but to you it's a reality because he is your personal friend you talk to him every day you have no difficulty whatsoever saying to an atheist I know that my redeemer lives because I meet him every day and I speak to him every day and

I come to tell him every day what's on my heart and he speaks back to me through his word and through his spirit taking his word that I might know him oh how precious to come to the Lord's table and find that these are not bare elements that you simply take mechanically as if you were just following it as some do as a kind of ritual and creedal sort of activity that is just outward and formal you come to the Lord's supper you take these elements and you do so knowing the one they represent and being thankful that the one who's represented in them is your best friend that I might know him and that I might know the power of his resurrection resurrection there's a wonderful thing too the power of his resurrection he's not just looking forward to the time of his own resurrection thinking of the power of

Christ then taking him out from the dust of the earth and raising him up to meet him as he says elsewhere to the Thessalonians what he's talking about is everyday life everyday needs his life as he meets the challenges of life the challenges of living as a Christian and as an apostle what does he need in order to face temptation what does he need to overcome his own sinful heart what does he need to overcome the opposition that he meets with as a man of God as he's surrounded by so many people that even as he went to the Philippians are enemies of the cross of Christ he needs power where's he going to find it the power of Christ's resurrection and the wonderful thing is as he himself wrote to the Ephesians in Ephesians 1 verses 19 to 20 you can look at them afterwards you find that that's exactly what he's saying the one who is working in us he says in accordance with the power that he showed when he raised Christ from the dead and set him at his own right hand what kind of power can actually raise a dead body to life and take that person and exalt them to the right hand of God the power of God the power of Christ's own resurrection the power inherent in Christ himself in rising from the dead in overcoming death and policing that's what's working in you isn't that fantastic almost beyond belief that for our everyday needs you should have no less than the risen Christ in his power in the resurrection power that is his actually enabling you to go about your life as a Christian day by day however great that need is going to be you can be assured of this it is never going to be greater than the power that raised Christ from the dead not even when you come to your death and think of the way that you need to overcome that death in him in principle you have already overcome it and when it comes to your resurrection the same power that's now working in you will bring you out immortal powerful spirit filled that I might share his sufferings for a statement that is what does he mean by it well in a very brief word he if you think about what it means to be a

[34 : 30] Christian really always takes you back to the cross and to the life that Christ lived in this world and to the sufferings he endured it takes you back to his own emphasis if anyone will be my disciple let him deny himself let him take up his cross and follow me in other words there has to be a death in our experience a death to sin a death to the things that we know God himself disapproves of a death to self and Paul is saying that's what it means or some of what it means to share his sufferings not just to identify with him in the way that he himself faced the challenges of his life not just to identify with him but to share that with him to be part of if you like that same movement of God where he is the head and we are his body and where we share with him standing for the glory of God against all that comes our way and if he says becoming like him in his death well that follows on from what he's saying about sharing in the suffering becoming like him in his death from that sense that you do die to sin that you that you share the kind of death that Jesus died of course not including bearing sin and bearing the penalty of sin but in the sense in which he's going on to speak about resurrection you can say that's the death that

Jesus died one that was followed by resurrection and when you think about it that way that's what he wants to share as well that when he comes to die he's going to die anticipating a glorious victorious resurrection which is why he says that if by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead it's a unique phrase that he uses there and it means something like this that when it comes to his resurrection out from all the dead that will be taken from their graves and that's everyone Paul in Christ whatever may be true of anyone else Paul in Christ is sure of this he will rise out from among them and attain the resurrection of the just of the saved of the glorified people of God or people who will be led immediately to glory the surpassing worth of knowing Christ the spiritual wealth we have from gaining Christ considering that everything of our spiritual wealth comes with him and in him let me just close with this as you go through that passage you'll find the three primary graces or emphases that the gospel brings to us that apply to Christians justification sanctification and glorification justification righteous in Christ sanctification sharing in his sufferings being made ready for glory being sanctified by God glorification resurrection out from among the dead conformable to Christ what kind of a gain is that is it any wonder that he could describe it as the surpassing worth of knowing

Christ not even Paul for all his brilliance could find adequate words to describe how much Christ is worth to him let's pray our gracious God we pray that as we consider these words of your truth that we might know ourselves to have that same conviction of the apostle that we count all things but loss or the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord and we pray Lord that it may be our constant desire also to go forward in your strength seeking that being justified by faith and being sanctified by your spirit we may at last attain that resurrection to glory that is the destiny of all your

people hear us now and accept us we pray for Jesus sake
Amen