

# Philippians 3:1-11

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[0:00] My name is Dave, I'm one of Shoreline's pastors or elders, and I get to open up Philippians! I'll give you a moment to turn there on your app or in your physical Bible. I believe there are some! If you don't own one yourself or have one with you. If you don't have a Bible of your own, that's now your Bible, if you would like it. We are not Shoreline Community Bible Church for nothing.

And so, let us attend to God's Word. Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. Look out for the dogs. Look out for the evildoers. Look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the circumcision who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh. 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. 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.

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. For His sake, I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, 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, 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. This is God's Word. Let's pray.

Amen. O Lord, our God, in these moments, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in Your sight. O Lord, our rock and our Redeemer, will You open up the truths of this passage and open up our hearts to them that we might glory in Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

What's this passage all about? It's not a trick question, but the key to this passage might be something that is easy for us to miss. Our minds are probably filled right now with questions like, who are these dogs, evildoers, mutilators? What does Paul mean when he says, by any means possible, I may attain the resurrection from the dead? What does he mean that he would want to share Christ's sufferings? All these and more we need to answer to fully understand this passage.

[4:03] But none of them are actually the key. And in fact, it's that key that helps us understand each of these questions. They serve his one big goal here.

I'm not going to leave you in the dark here, right? Paul puts it right up front. In all of this passage about enemies of Christ and Paul's own transformation and suffering and resurrection and more, one thing stands at the head of the text and stands over the text.

Verse 1, Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.

Isn't that a little bit strange for a couple reasons? We just finished chapter 2 of a four-chapter letter. We are halfway.

Not at the end. We are halfway. We stand at the midpoint and suddenly Paul says, Finally. Shouldn't finally come at the finish?

[5:19] And what's even more strange is he's going to say, Finally, brothers, again in chapter 4, verse 8. So is Paul like the stereotypical preacher who can't land the plane, can't actually finish? I got one more thing. Wait, wait, wait. One more thing.

I think not. I think he's doing something intentional here. I think we really have actually reached the conclusion of Paul's letter. It's just a very long conclusion.

There are a couple breaks in these last two chapters, chapters 3 and 4, and they share some things in common. Here we see him say, Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. Then he's going to say, Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and my crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. He's going to say, Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, Rejoice.

Finally, brothers, he'll say, Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. And he's going to say of himself, chapter 4, verse 10, I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at length you have revived your concern for me.

Two things keep standing out after he here says, Finally, the command to rejoice, or Paul's example of rejoicing, and the instruction to stand firm in the Lord or fix our gaze firmly on the things of God. The whole second half of this letter is one long conclusion where Paul ties those two themes together. And so, this finally, in chapter 3, verse 1, isn't at a place, his conclusion, what we do with all of this. It comes in this repeated command, Rejoice in the Lord.

[7:32] And that's a tall order, isn't it? Can you command someone to rejoice? I mean, you can say the words, but people can't rejoice on command, right? You can do all sorts of things on command, but probably not that. All right, cadets, you do all sorts of things on command, right?

On the drill field, you move your bodies on command, right? You speak certain words on command. How's the cow? She talks, she's full of chalk, the lactate fluid extracted from the female of the bovine species is highly prolific to the 2007th degree, right? If you know, you know. What about rejoice on command? We can do all manner of things on command, but we can't do things like love and trust and rejoice on command. That's not something that we can make happen in another person. And we can't really actually decide to do it ourselves. It's not really up to me.

Let's say for some reason that you desired to rejoice over federal income taxes. I mean, we all agree that it is nice to have an interstate system and health inspectors. You might appreciate the results of taxes, but I imagine try as you might, you're going to have a hard time rejoicing in them. To rejoice, you must first find something worth rejoicing over.

And that thing must be forefront in your mind, not obscured by destruction or pain. That's how anyone comes to rejoice, which is why Paul pairs these two commands together. Rejoice and set your mind.

Set your mind on what is good. Set your mind on the gospel. Set your mind on Christ. Contrast. If he wants us to be amazed, he has to show us something amazing. If he wants us to trust, he needs to show us something, someone trustworthy. If he wants us to rejoice, he has to show us something worth rejoicing over. And that is exactly what he will do in different ways over and over in these last two chapters. Friends, this is a formula for joy, for your joy.

[10:34] We'll find that our joy, lasting joy, won't depend on our accomplishments or our circumstances, the places we normally look for joy. It's definitely possible to rejoice in those things, but it's unwise to stake our central hopes on them. We can't guarantee success in our circumstances and in our accomplishments, and they certainly aren't permanent. They can be taken from us, so Paul is going to give us a formula for joy that doesn't depend on what is in flux, but on that which is solid and eternal. So, the key to this passage and to the rest of the letter, since it is one long conclusion, is to remember that Paul is writing each of these things so that we will rejoice in the Lord, which means, contrary to what we would normally think as we just read through this, it means that when he says, look out for the dogs,

He is writing something to protect our joy. When he writes about giving up everything, it's so that you'll have something before your eyes that stokes joy.

And when he talks about sharing Christ's sufferings, he's pressing you into joy. How extraordinary is that?

How counterintuitive is that? So, let's see how we can obey this command to rejoice. Verse 2.

Look out for the dogs. Look out for the evildoers. Look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the circumcision who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.

[12:54] Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also, if anyone thinks he has 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, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

But whatever gain I had, I counted as a loss for the sake of Christ. Who are these dogs? Evildoers. Those who mutilate the flesh that Paul is standing kind of in contrast to. And what does that have to do with the command to rejoice?

We have a few clues. Paul says that they mutilate the flesh. And in contrast to that, he says that we are the circumcision. He's talking about his own adherence here to the Jewish law.

So, we should understand that Paul is talking about members of the church who are teaching or demanding, perhaps, that other Christians submit to the Jewish law in order to either come to Christ or perhaps to remain in Christ or something along those lines.

[14:18] Scholars often call this group the Judaizers because they were bringing practices of Judaism forward into the New Covenant. And that law entails a lot of practices, observing special days, following a specific diet, and the banner over it all, kind of the point of entry and the symbol that we can point to as the paragon... Not the paragon.

The symbol for the whole thing is circumcision. As Paul points out in his kind of Jewish resume here that he was circumcised, it happens to Jewish boys eight days after birth, and it marked the whole home as part of the community that God had given His covenant to.

And so, verses 2 and 3 are an extraordinary statement. Paul is saying here that those who now demand circumcision aren't actually participating in God's covenant when that was the covenant sign.

They're merely mutilating people. They're doing evil. And he's saying that Gentile Christians are the circumcision.

It is hard to express how much this would have scandalized Paul himself just a few years prior, before his conversion to Christ.

[15:51] But now he says things like this. Now he says things like Romans chapter 2. No one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical.

But a Jew is one inwardly. And circumcision is a matter of the heart by the Spirit, which is in line with what circumcision was always intended to point to. In Deuteronomy chapter 10, the Lord said, Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.

For the Lord your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God. Or the message of the prophets.

Jeremiah said, Circumcise yourselves to the Lord. Remove the foreskin of your hearts, O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem. Okay.

But what does that have to do with the command to rejoice? Circumcision, as they improperly understood it, was in their mindset part of a system where, by your obedience, you can be more or less acceptable to God.

[17:08] And I got to say, that is the natural position of every person's heart. Right? We all naturally think that.

And it kind of sounds awesome. Right? Oh, good. We can do things to be right with God. Excellent. And it just feels natural to us.

Isn't that how relationships typically work? You can do nice things to people, and you'll be happy about it. Right? But this isn't actually very awesome at all. It doesn't lead to rejoicing.

And Paul knows that from his own experience. That's what he's saying through the rest of those verses, up to verse 7. Verses 4 through 6. He's saying, I did it all, and yet, verse 7, I still didn't have Christ.

I had to lose it all in order to gain Christ. None of us has enough to earn Christ. And what's more, even if you think it's only partially up to you to be acceptable before the Lord, just even a little bit,

you will never be free.

[18:23] You will never be free from the need to perform. You can never let your guard down. Even when you think you're doing well, right, that you've made yourself acceptable, and our natural inclination about what makes us acceptable before the Lord is kind of comical.

If you think about it, typically, I'm going to avoid these three sins. I'm going to forget about the, you know, I'm going to do this one act of generosity, or this. I think we have a very narrow view when we consider ourselves and what makes us acceptable before the Lord.

But even when we've done that and feel like we've made ourselves acceptable before the Lord, you might still slip up. So even when you're in a, when you feel like you're in a good spot, you might soon fall.

So you're always on alert, always afraid of falling out of God's good graces. It is very hard to rejoice when you're under pressure.

It's very hard to rejoice when you're being subjected to judgment by the one you're supposed to rejoice in. And so this idea that we could contribute even a little to our standing with God, it can never lead to our rejoicing.

[19:39] And not only that, it actually does the opposite. Because that mentality pushes us away from the fountain of joy.

How often do we avoid going to the Lord in prayer? Because we feel that we have somehow made ourselves unacceptable in His sight.

And distancing ourselves of God, well, distancing ourselves from God. I mean, He is the fountain of all joys. And so if we feel like, oh, I can't go to God because I've somehow made myself unacceptable, I am robbing myself of the joy of the presence of the God who has already made me acceptable in Christ.

And so a system where we contribute even a little to our acceptability before God is incompatible with true, enduring rejoicing.

And so that's why this is Paul's admonition here. He is protecting us. If He wants us to rejoice in the Lord, and side note, like rejoicing in the Lord is ascribing Him worth, is ascribing Him glory, is saying, I believe that you are better than ever.

[21:01] It is worship. He's protecting our worship as well. He's protecting that. Our joy and our worship by keeping us away from the system of belief that would derail our walk with Him and our nearness to the fountain of joy.

And that's why He shows in verses 4 through 6 that all His own works righteousness, it didn't get Him what He wanted. It demanded from Him constant striving.

There's no joy in that. It is hardly a formula for joy. But, He says, verse 8, thanks be to God, He says, 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 and be found in Him, 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.

Friends, those two verses, that's Christianity in a nutshell. We couldn't earn our way to God, verses 2 through 7.

[22:33] But He offered to us what we couldn't do. He offered us, what does He say in verse 8? That He gained Christ.

And was reconciled to Him. How? How did He get this? How did He get the One who is above all? How did He gain Christ?

It was not by His own righteousness, verse 9. Not by His own merits. But by faith in Christ.

When we rest our souls on Him, entrust ourselves to Him, the Lord joins us by His Spirit to the Son, to Jesus Christ.

That's why He says, found in Him. And so bestows upon us His righteousness. And suddenly we are acceptable before the face of God forever.

[23:42] And so we are welcome in the presence of the Lord of glory. And heaven's gates open to us.

And resurrection is our hope. And our faith belongs to the One who governs all things. And we are blessed with Christ, with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

And so Paul says, rejoice. Rejoice. You have all things in Christ.

Rejoice. And it came at no cost to you. It would cost Him a high price. But He offered it to you for free.

And so I want to say, if you don't have that source of joy, endless and infinite, you can have what Paul has.

[24:48] He's shown you the path to it already. You may have what is of surpassing worth, knowing Christ Jesus.

And you do not need to earn it. You can't. He is so surpassing in His greatness that earning Him is beyond our ability. But He offered Himself up to make you acceptable in the Father's sight so that you may dwell with Him in glory forever.

Forever. And we're about to see that it's not some distant thing. It is a right now thing. And so I call to any who would come.

Repent and believe on Jesus Christ and find the source that can sustain rejoicing forever. We're going to be thinking more and more about this, knowing Christ Jesus.

Knowing Him as we begin to come to our conclusion today. And I just want to point out that that's actually Jesus' main concern for us as well. In John 17, Jesus prayed before He went to the cross.

[26:16] The outset of that prayer, He spoke to His Father and said this. This is eternal life.

That they know you. That they know you. The only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. So Christians, your salvation in Christ is an infinite well of rejoicing, of blessing.

It is bottomless in its depth. Endless in its scope. We just sang. You stretched a scroll from sky to sky. You could not be filled with the glories of God.

So, even though today may be tremendously difficult for you, full of sorrow and pain and trouble and uncertainty, your King tells you.

[27:23] 1 Peter chapter 5. After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

To Him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. And it's interesting that just as Peter talks about our suffering and glory with Christ, that's exactly where Paul goes here today.

In verses 10 and 11. And he says, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and may share in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, that by any means possible, I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

And that's a scary thing. That does not look like the way to glory, suffering with Christ. That does not look like the path of rejoicing.

because we all know that you can't experience the power of resurrection without walking through death.

[28:46] You can know the power of preservation without knowing death, but not the power of resurrection. And how on earth does that help us to obey this command to rejoice?

So, what does it mean to share Christ's sufferings? Why would you want to? How does that connect to what Paul just said, knowing Him and the power of His resurrection?

How does suffering help you know Him? And how does all of this help us obey that command to rejoice? First, a clarification.

Not all suffering is suffering with Christ. Christ never suffered the consequences of His own sin.

So, if I'm a jerk and lose a relationship, right, that's not suffering with Christ. Christ might comfort me, but I was a jerk, and I'm not joining Him in anything. Right?

[29:56] If I'm a fool and suffer the consequences for my foolishness, that's not suffering with Christ. Christ will meet us in all those sorrows, but that's not the type of communion that Paul is talking about here.

Which leads us to another clarification. this is not the way I most often talk about suffering in the Christian life.

When I talk about suffering in the Christian life, most frequently, I start kind of with me. We talk about Jesus comforting us in our sorrows.

We stand in the valley of the shadow of death, suffering in some way, and our good shepherd comes to us with comfort, inviting our lament, bringing His Spirit, whom He calls the Comforter, and that is good and true.

Full stop. That is good and it is true of the Christian life. But that's not what Paul's talking about here, is it? Who is joining whom here?

[31:09] Paul is going into Christ's sufferings. Christ isn't coming into His. These verses are not about Jesus joining us in our suffering, though He does. This passage is about us joining Christ in His suffering.

It's as if we walk through the shadow of the valley of death and find that He is already there. How does that help us know Him?

And how does that help us rejoice? It begins by contemplating Christ's sufferings, going to Him, joining Him there and seeing better, more clearly, who in fact He is, what in fact His heart is towards me, how great is His humble, merciful glory, and having a renewed sense of awe in Him.

What might that look like? Let me try to give us some examples of where I think Paul is pointing us here. Some families at Shoreline have recently had their first children.

Congratulations. The moment that happens, suddenly, so many things that you've heard from other parents just make sense.

[32:51] people without children are laughing at that. You have no idea. But when you have your first kid, you just get it now.

Like, you get so many things. Because you've joined the club, you've shared the experience.

There's a camaraderie that comes from, I get it.

I see what you're going through. And I know. We understand each other now. And it's not just new parents, right? People, you know, put bumper stickers, it's a Jeep thing, right?

And so too, foster parents, racial minorities, and other groups also experience a similar camaraderie from that shared experience.

Knowing what the other has gone through in a way that others can't. And I think Paul is talking about that experience. And not doing it with just some other person, but doing it with Christ.

[33:55] That we may know Him. That He keeps going back to knowing Him. That we may know Him better. And in so doing, rejoice more fully because we have seen better the glory of this God whom we serve and who loves us.

If Paul suffers like Christ did, he will come to better understand the heart of his Lord who went through all those things not because it was forced upon him, but because he wanted to do it on Paul's behalf and Christian, on yours.

suffering with Christ doesn't look like me suffering the consequences of my own sin or the consequences of my own foolishness, but it can look like suffering for the ministry of Christ.

I recently heard a pastor confess that fear of man had kept him from sharing the gospel in a particular circumstance and he was lamenting over that.

He was afraid of the rejection that it might have caused in that relationship. But what if he had been rejected for the message of the gospel?

[35:15] The rejection that he would have felt there would have helped him enter into Christ's experience where he was rejected for the message of the gospel, for the free offer of the gospel for someone else's good.

He would have seen and felt firsthand what our Lord went through on our behalf. If you share the gospel and you are rejected, you will feel something that Christ received as well and therefore know him in his suffering better there's a reason that we like to visit the childhood homes of famous people or of our own ancestors.

We want to see what shaped them to experience what they experienced. It connects us to them. If we suffer for the sake of the gospel, we will experience what he experienced.

And that connects us to him in a new and deeper way. This also happens not only when we suffer for gospel ministry, but also when we suffer innocently.

Ed Welch wrote a book called Shame Interrupted. There are so many sources of shame in someone's life that could be there. The Bible has so many tools that I highly commend that book to you.

[36:53] Shame Interrupted. If a person is dealing with shame because of something that was done to them, something shameful was done to that person, Welch takes us on that journey of connecting to Christ.

here's what he says. You will remember that Jesus voluntarily chose to take on shame and rejection.

And you know something of what that was like. You can relate to Jesus when you suffer innocently. Now you know Jesus a little better. you had an experience similar to his. You will talk to him about it and something personal will pass between the two of you.

The insight no doubt will leave you humbled. You will be learning firsthand that there is nothing better than knowing Jesus. This was Paul's joy in suffering and shame and then he quotes Philippians 3 10 and 11 and of that he says notice how this affects your shamed past.

[38:19] It will still hurt at times but the shame will lose its power. The very event that made you an outcast is the one that gives you insight into the mind of Christ.

as you enjoy that new knowledge of Jesus you will soon remember something that will leave you humbled in a way that only sacrificial love can.

Jesus chose the path of shame for you and because of you. This is not the way we normally think about suffering and so I hope that these dots are connecting.

That by recognizing when we suffer for the gospel that we are entering into the experience that Jesus made and so we are joining him sharing his sufferings and so we know him better.

When we suffer innocently we know that he voluntarily took on innocent suffering on our behalf and so the event that made us harmed in whatever way that is Whether it's shame or some other harm is the one that gives you insight into the mind of Christ that you may know him better.

[39:52] Let's return to that first end parent thing. Suddenly life has changed completely. Your heart expands with love just as your eyes sag with fatigue.

It's not just that you feel love for your child now. And it's not just that you feel kinship with other parents.

Suddenly you appreciate someone else as well. Your own parents. Wait a minute. You did all of this. You did all.

I had no idea you did all of this work for me. How much more so with Christ? When we suffer for his name or we suffer for making loving sacrifices of our own or we have been harmed and we get a glimpse of what he has done for us.

And we say to him just like we say to our parents you did all of that for me? I had no idea. But the difference is of course that your parents probably gave you something around the same amount that you're giving your child, their grandkids.

[41:18] In some cases there is a big gap but it is still on a human scale. But Jesus Christ, what he gave, his leaps and bounds and light years past our sufferings and our sacrifices because in his suffering he atoned for our sins before the just and good wrath of God.

We may bear the mocking tongue with him and know him better but the good and righteous fury of divine justice, he bore that alone.

Now it might be that the parenting analogy I just drew could be painful for someone in this room. Those who long for children and do not have them due to infertility, due to singleness or an unwilling spouse or many other issues.

That is a form of suffering innocently, isn't it not? Is it not? And so even in that you may share in Christ's sufferings.

Hear his longing for absent children. Matthew chapter 23. Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it.

[42:53] How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings and you are not willing. Your unmet longing for children exposes to yourself in a way that really can't for me.

You have a unique experience love. Of God's own heart. If we suffer innocently or suffer on behalf of the gospel ministry, we get to know Jesus better and in that we rejoice.

your sorrows join you to Christ and teach you his heart and draw you near to his grace. I was offering pastoral care to someone this week who feels abandoned by their father. With this passage in mind, I was able to say, you feel forsaken by your father. In that, do you now feel a better understanding and appreciation for Jesus who hung on a cross and experienced a forsakenness from the father?

Do you know him better because of that? You understand parental forsakenness. do you understand his heart better knowing that he went to it willingly for you?

[44:45] And do you recognize that he did it so that you might be reconciled to a father in heaven whose love will never fail, who will never abandon you?

suffering is not natural. It is not natural to this world.

Our first parents were not meant to taste death. Only when sin, also unnatural, entered, did death enter, and suffering is a taste of that curse.

When we suffer, we enter into an experience of that curse, that death, and who is there already? Standing there is the one who willingly suffered death, and whose voice raises the dead.

[45:59] Let's pray. Oh, Lord, there is none like you who can transform our suffering into rejoicing because it shows us more of the goodness of your heart.

How spectacular is that? Lord, we praise you. We praise you because who could have come up with that?

Only the God of glory. Thank you that you have made it possible, not by our efforts, which could never make it, but by Christ's suffering on our behalf, that we might be united to you forever.

Lord, I pray that you would reshape our attitudes by the understanding that the Apostle Paul gives to us today.

Reshape our understanding, Lord, of our whole lives. Be glorified in us as we learn more and more to rejoice in you.

[47:30] We ask it in Christ's name. Amen.