

# Knowing Christ

*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: 16 February 2003

Preacher: The Venerable Daniel Gifford

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, we're looking at Philippians chapter 3, verses 1 through 11 on page 186, and we'll be going through those verses, and I want to begin by welcoming everybody who's been here for less than 10 years as well, so I can be here.

And I want to say, too, that this is a time of year, February, that's a time to think about investing, apparently, because if you watch television and read the newspapers, you're inundated by ads extolling the virtues of investing.

And often the incentive that is placed for investing is that you will receive happiness and security if you do so, and that's why there's lots of images of people frolicking on beaches with palm trees and warm water, lapping at their feet.

And lots of time with family in total harmony as well. And the common theme, if you notice, of these ads is freedom from anxiety, a freedom from anxiety that investments bring.

Now, unfortunately, those happy pictures run a bit hollow these days when we are in a world that has the possibility of war at a backdrop, and people are very anxious about that.

[ 1 : 12 ] We saw millions of people yesterday expressing their anxiety over war. And with that war, of course, comes uncertainty in the economy. And so I asked myself, if I did have money to invest, where would I put it that would be safe?

Where would be the place that I could count on? And at times like this, it's often the church where people go to as a place of refuge. But even in our own Anglican denomination, we are facing times of anxiety and uncertainty as well.

So maybe when you think of it, the beach might be a great place to be right now. And maybe I'll spend my RSPs going there. But of course, anxieties will follow you to the beach wherever you go. And the question that we are faced with this morning is, how does the gospel address the anxieties that we have in life? Paul is facing a similar situation in the sense that he is writing to a church that is facing anxiety as well.

And he tells them that the gospel has everything to do with how you deal with anxiety. And he is in a situation where he is writing to a church that is very worried about Paul, their beloved leader.

[ 2 : 29 ] He is somebody that has gone through a lot of suffering, they know. And they know that he is going to face a possible execution, a trial, that is very, very stressful. And I think that those choir psalms that they had for David short last week would be very appropriate for Paul in their attitude towards Paul here.

They want him to be shielded from the things that they know are happening to him. And this church is also experiencing suffering of their own because there are teachers coming in who are talking about a very different gospel.

Strange new teaching. It would have frightened them. And they probably would have worried, if Paul is not going to be around, who will lead us? Who will be there to make sure the gospel remains true?

So into that anxious situation, Paul sends this letter. And he tells them how the gospel powerfully deals with anxious times. And it's true for our troubles today as it was for them a little less than 2,000 years ago.

He tells us here in verse 1, he gives it all away. He says this, Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. Now, if Paul had simply said, rejoice, we would have called him a Pollyanna and just sort of dismissed him.

[ 3 : 44 ] But he says, rejoice in the Lord. And that's what this whole letter is calling people to do and urging them to do. And that's what he is going to tell them in these next 11 verses.

Everything that you need for joy and security is found in Jesus. And he teaches them to recognize Jesus' value to us as being something far beyond we can achieve or ask for.

It's far beyond anything the world can offer. And he does this by giving to them a warning and a testimony. And so the warning is in verse 2.

And he emphasizes the warning by saying, look out three times. Beware. Three times for emphasis. So he says, look out for the dogs.

Look out for the evil workers. Look out for those who mutilate the flesh. And Paul is talking about religious leaders and teachers who came to Philippi.

[ 4 : 44 ] And he's not being very nice. It's very strong language. It's offensive even to us today. He's really burning any chance for reconciliation with these teachers with that kind of language.

And there's a reason why Paul is so fierce. It is because he's telling them, this is a grave danger that you are being taught. Because this teaching of these people are actually leading them away from their source of joy and eternal security and life.

We don't exactly know what the details of the teaching is. But we do know from Paul's response that they were calling for the need for circumcision and confidence in the flesh.

Now confidence in the flesh simply means work and rules that need to be kept in order to guarantee salvation. And they were also saying that the act of circumcision was necessary in order to receive the promises of God for his people.

So you had to have the mark in order to receive what Jesus gives. And essentially what they were saying is, you need Jesus and he's great. But you also need these other things as well.

[ 5 : 53 ] It's Jesus plus. Jesus and these other things. And so what Paul does here is he tells us this is dangerous teaching and he contradicts it in one verse.

In verse 3. And he says in verse 3, For we are the true circumcision who worship God in spirit and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.

By saying they are the true circumcision, he says they have already been set apart to God. And set apart for what? They worship or serve God. Worship, which means serve God in spirit.

Meaning that their hearts have been changed and transformed by God. And they've been set free by him in order to serve. And what do they do in their service?

They glory in Christ Jesus. Meaning they boast in him because he is so powerful to transform and save people within himself. And therefore they put no confidence in the flesh.

[ 6 : 54 ] They don't put confidence in anything that they can do to save them. All of their confidence is in Jesus. It is not divided and it is not shared. Now glorying in Christ alone changes our hearts.

And that's a very different teaching from what they have received from these false teachers. And you can see why Paul has such strong language for them. Because they are actually diminishing Christ even though they don't mention him directly.

It's likely they said, you know, we believe in Jesus just as you do. We are not talking about the central things about Jesus here. These are just some extra things that are very important to accept. And Paul puts big warning signs about this deception because that is how the gospel, confidence in the gospel is eroded. It's a teaching that looks good in itself. But it denies the power of the gospel to reach people and alone to transform them.

And today we know that this kind of teaching has not died out. And one of the forms it takes today in the church is called inclusivism. It's a teaching that stops at saying we simply accept a person in whatever state they find themselves.

[ 8 : 05 ] And that sounds good. And there is lots of truth in that. But it doesn't go on to the power of the gospel. Which says, and what is compromised and not taught is the exclusive truth.

That only Jesus transforms hearts and minds so that people can obey God and his word. Only Jesus loves with such power that it would change us in his gospel.

And so when we deny the power of the gospel to save, we are in grave danger. We deny the power of Jesus Christ alone. And that's why Paul tells the church in verse 1 that his warning brings safety to them.

He is safeguarding his flock, which is part of the ministry of every pastor. As David mentioned last week, he is guarding them so that they will glory in Jesus alone and not lose their joy.

Now not only does Paul warn the church about things that would make them turn away from glorying in Jesus. He shows them what it means to glory in Jesus from his own life as he gives his testimony.

[ 9 : 11 ] And he speaks right to the false teachers at the end of verse 4 when he says, Look, if any other man thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more.

It's an audacious thing to say. He is saying, if merit points were the way that you became somebody who is accepted by God, he had a lot more than they did. He has pedigree in verses 5 and 6. The first four things he mentions are what his background is. He was circumcised on the eighth day. In other words, he's not a convert. He was born into the covenant. He is of the people of Israel. He's part of the elected race. He is of the tribe of Benjamin, a tribe that was highly thought of. It was a tribe that actually included the city of Jerusalem and the Holy Temple. And it remained loyal to King David. He is a Hebrew born of Hebrews, he says. In other words, he's a pure-blooded Jew. He's pure culturally. There's no pagan taint at all to him.

[ 10 : 12 ] That's his pedigree. Now he turns to his accomplishments. As to the law, he says, I'm a Pharisee. In other words, he was somebody who was the best at keeping the law.

And he was very, very good outwardly. He was a pious person. A person that you would say, here is a person without fault. And he has zeal.

Zeal about the law and being good. He uses his zeal as a persecutor of the church. In other words, he used his political strength against anyone who didn't believe that the law itself saves you.

And finally, as to righteousness under the law, he was blameless. He kept the law as well as any person could. And all of these things would have been very impressive in a eulogy at that time in Israel.

If anyone could get favor from God, here was the guy. He had the ultimate form of confidence in the flesh. And I would say that that may be one of the dangers that we have here in our church.

[ 11 : 15 ] Because we often think of difficulties in life that would keep us from actually knowing Christ and serving him. But many of us have very good reason to have confidence in the flesh.

Many of us have good pedigree. Our parents may have gone to church and brought us to church. We may have been members and regular attenders of the church for more than ten years. We may have been people who have great accomplishments in the congregation. Great leaders. Great works of service and ministry over the years. Lots of charity to people in need. Living upright, moral lives. And successful in our work by God's blessing. These are very good things. But the danger is that we would ever trust them instead of Jesus Christ to earn God's love and forgiveness.

To bring us to God. That we would glory in something else other than Jesus Christ. Well, Paul puts all of this in perspective.

[ 12 : 17 ] The confidence in the flesh. When he talks about his conversion in verse 7. And having talked about his immense religious qualifications, he says, But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

And those are probably his thoughts when he was on the road to Damascus and Jesus spoke to him. And said, Paul, Paul, why are you persecuting me? Saul.

Those are his thoughts as his world is turned upside down. All those things he thought were gain were loss in the reality of Jesus Christ in his life. But it goes on.

There's a further conversion that he talks about in his life. It's an ongoing one in verse 8. Indeed, I count. I keep on counting. Now, everything is loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ, my Lord.

What those two verses show us is the path, I believe, for joy for every Christian. And that is through conversion. It is conversion that happens at some point in one's life when everything that you trust in for security and happiness is counted as zero by you in the balance sheet.

[ 13 : 35 ] And it's because of Jesus Christ. That moment when you realize that the things that you thought were what bring you to God and make you good are nothing. And that Christ is everything.

And it's in conversion that every day you trust in the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ your Lord. In realizing daily that he is your source of life and security and forgiveness.

It's not your pedigree in the good things that you do. And just to make sure the Philippians get the message, he says something shocking, Paul does.

He says next that for his sake, I have suffered all things. And when he says that, he says, I have suffered the loss of my freedom, my future, my status, and his skin as well.

And all those physical beatings and so forth that he went through. But he says those loss of those things which are so important, I count as refuse or dung as the King James Version describes it.

[14:38] In other words, he says trusting in Jesus has meant loss for Paul. But Jesus means so much to him that those good things he lost because of Jesus are like garbage in comparison.

And that is what it means for him to put such an incredibly high value on Jesus Christ. It's his expression of saying just how much Jesus is for him.

Now the wonderful thing about what he does here, after saying that he does this, he counts them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ.

I want you to notice that there are four things that he says result. Four things that give him a deep joy, a personal joy. And each begins with, I may.

The result of seeing Jesus as being so valuable. And so it begins there at the end of verse 8. In order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own based on the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

[15:49] You see, for Paul, there is a deep joy at being found in Jesus, in abiding in Christ, in living in that place where he is receiving forgiveness and Christ's righteousness and his life, his transforming life every day.

He is made clean daily and right with God daily by Jesus Christ. And you notice that faith is emphasized twice. Depends on faith. It is through faith.

He is talking about a trust in the value that Jesus gives to him. A deep trust in it. And it brings him great joy. And the second thing he says is right here in verse 10.

The second result of the value of Jesus is that I may know him and the power of his resurrection. You see, Paul rejoices simply in knowing Jesus Christ and being in a close, intimate relationship with him.

And to know Christ for Paul is to have the power of Jesus in the resurrection at work in his life right then. Raising him from the death of sin to a newness of life in Jesus.

[16:57] What a contrast his life is today from what it was before he was converted. He is experiencing what we pray for in the communion service.

Where we ask God to forgive us so that we may walk in newness of life. So that we may experience the life of God. And then thirdly, he says, and may share his sufferings becoming like him in his death.

There's a result of joy. There's great joy for Paul in that when he suffers in following Jesus, he knows he's actually suffering with Jesus. He is not alone.

The joy of Christ actually goes into the darkest times in his life. And in them, he is sharing the suffering of Jesus on the cross. In his deepest anxieties, he knows that the living Christ is with him. And giving significance to what he is going through. And finally, the fourth result, the fourth aspect of joy is that if possible, I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

[18:05] And here Paul is talking about deep joy that prevails over even his death. Paul is certain that he will attain the resurrection. And when he says by if possible, he means that he is uncertain about his immediate future.

How he will die. What will happen in this life. And he is also probably expressing a deep humility. That this, the greatest of gifts that God gives, the resurrection from the dead, is his.

It's a humbling thing. It's a free gift to him by Jesus Christ. Part of that surpassing value of knowing Jesus. And it is that resurrection of the dead that he knows the conflict will be over.

His suffering will be ended. And he will obtain wholeness in the gift of a transformed body that will be like Jesus. There is joy spelled out for us by Jesus.

By Paul in Jesus. And I want to close by reflecting on two aspects of these things that Paul rejoices over. The first is how deeply personal they all are.

[19:13] That the Jesus Christ who is Lord of heaven and earth, which we saw in the last chapter, does a deeply personal work in Paul and us.

Paul is not sharing this with us because he wants to tell us all about himself. He is telling them that because the joy that he knows is the joy that everyone who has received the gospel knows as well.

Paul tells us this because Jesus brings his greatness into your life and my life today.

Paul tells us this because Jesus brings his greatness into your life and my life today.

The Lord of the universe cares for us personally, loves us, blesses us in powerful ways as a gift, as a personal gift to us. And the second thing I want you to notice about those expressions of joy is that the world or any religion, any kind of work in this world cannot offer these things.

[ 20 : 23 ] It has no source in this world. Only Jesus can give us his righteousness, his forgiveness, his cleanness. Only Jesus can bring us into a relationship with him and work so powerfully in our lives.

Only Jesus can come into suffering and make it mean something. Come into suffering and allow us to share with him in it. And of course, only Jesus gives the resurrection of the dead.

Only Jesus has this true, powerful, living hope that passes through death. And I believe that we are called today as we hear this reading to place all of our value on Jesus and this joy that he alone brings to us.

The proper response to anxiety that you are experiencing and I experience today is that we would be converted daily. That we would decide that knowing Christ Jesus our Lord is surpassing worth in everything.

Even the things that are very good and important to us are lost in comparison to him. When we allow that truth to shape our decisions, to shape our relationships, to shape our understanding of the world, and to shape the way that we spend our money, joy will replace anxiety.

[ 21 : 46 ] The power of the gospel will come into the anxiety. And we will know that Jesus is Lord over the world and us. This is how we rejoice in the Lord.

May his joy be our hope and our strength and our song. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. G Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.