

Philippians 3:1-14

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[0 : 00] It'd be great if you would open your Bibles to Philippians chapter 3, the Bible that sits in front of you there, it's COVID free, completely clean, able to do all sorts of powerful things for you.

Philippians chapter 3, page 981 that Paul just read for us. We now come to the second half of the book of Philippians and Paul begins again with the keynote of joy.

It's the 10th time he's mentioned joy in the book because he's aware there are so many things that steal joy away. But for the first time he says this, my brothers and sisters in verse 1, rejoice in the Lord.

And we shouldn't read that rejoice in the Lord, we should read that rejoice in the Lord because our true joy comes from nowhere else.

Christ Jesus is the secret of Christian happiness. And the apostle wants all the believers at Philippi and everyone who reads this to glory in Christ Jesus.

[1 : 07] Because something has happened to Paul that gives him an endless supply of joy, which not even prison or the threat of execution can take away.

And he tells us what the source of that joy is and what's happened to him in verse 7 and 8, which is the heart of the passage. He says, 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.

So something drastic has happened to the apostle Paul. Something's taken a hold of him so that all that he thought of that was important, all his carefully curated credentials, everything that made him shine in his peer group, he now regards as a hindrance and, as we'll see in a moment, even manure.

All his accomplishments, all the virtues of his former life, his credits, his credentials, all that made him belong to the in-group, all that he'd worked his whole life for, had now become a millstone around his neck.

[2 : 29] And when you see the surpassing worth of Jesus Christ, all those things that used to control us, all those things that still threaten to control us and steal away joy, are nothing compared to Christ.

All those other things in our life, they're like tiny star pinpricks in the heavens. But when the Son of Christ arises, it outshines them all. This is the key.

Seeing the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ, it turns us inside out, it turns us upside down. And even though there were lots of things in Paul's life and lots of things in our lives that were good in themselves, all our virtues and successes and righteousnesses, they only prevent us from knowing the joy of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now I want to gain him. I want to be found in him. And that's the key to joy. So the question this morning is, what is it about Jesus Christ that makes him outshine, outstrip, exceed and transcend everything else that's good?

And that's the purpose of this passage. And the way the apostle does it is he spells out how the Christian life starts and then how the Christian life matures.

[3 : 47] So I've just got two points this morning. Firstly, the start of the Christian life, and that is to be found in him. And then the ongoing experience of the Christian life that I may know him.

So two points. Number one, the start of the Christian life. So he goes on from verse 8. He says in verse 9, I want to 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.

So when you become a Christian, you have this experience of being found by God. You may have been searching, and when you meet Christ, it's not that you've found God, you discover you have

been found by him.

Because you cannot make yourself a Christian. It's not something you take up, it's something that takes you up. So what does this mean? Paul says it comes down to two completely different, two mutually exclusive forms of righteousness.

On the one side is my own righteousness, verse 9. My own righteousness is what I've done, my accomplishments, my achievements, what makes me feel accepted and approved.

[5 : 15] And I gave my staff a list of my accomplishments. This I did. And about halfway through, I thought, oh dear, I'm doing what Paul does here. They can be privileges that you were born with.

Whatever you make your own, this is my self-made righteousness. The other is completely different. Paul, in verse 9, calls it the righteousness from God.

It is the righteousness of Christ that comes to me by faith in his cross. So think about Jesus, all his perfect obeying and loving and doing good, all his perfect serving.

When I trust Jesus Christ, all the righteousness that is in Jesus Christ becomes mine. I can now call his righteousness my own. That is the righteousness from God.

And theologians call it alien righteousness. Not because it's spooky or strange or comes from outer space, but simply because it doesn't come from in me.

[6 : 20] It comes from another person. I didn't earn it. I didn't achieve it. It comes from God by faith. The perfect righteousness of Christ, which he gives to all who trust in him.

And I feel like stopping at this point and making sure we've all understood this point. This is the heart of the gospel. You see, when you come to Jesus Christ by faith, we all receive a double gift, two gifts.

He takes away my sin. He wipes me clean. And on top of that, he grants me the perfect righteousness of Christ. You see, he doesn't just take away my sin so that I then get on with building up a new record of self-made righteousness.

He forgives my sin, and he exchanges all my unrighteousness and gives me the righteousness of Christ. That does not mean that we are made instantly obedient or instantly sinless, you will have noticed.

But it means that his perfect purity is now mine. It means I don't suddenly become morally excellent in my daily life.

[7 : 35] Now it means that I live out of and I stand on the righteousness of Christ, which is mine. And there's only one way that I can receive the righteousness from God, and that is I have to abandon my self-made righteousness.

And now God looks on me when he does. He sees all the goodness and holiness of Jesus Christ. And this, brothers and sisters, is almost too good to believe.

This is how the Christian life starts. This is the basis of joy. This is the reason why we glory in Jesus Christ. This is why our long-term spiritual confidence is not in ourselves or our performance, but in Jesus Christ alone.

And that's the point of verses two to six. The Philippians were in danger from some new teachers who said, look, yeah, yeah, yeah, Jesus is good as far as he goes, but he doesn't go far enough. You need something more. You need to obey all the Old Testament law, and especially you need the mark of the Old Covenant, which is circumcision. This is not so much of a temptation to us today, although it's still around, and we have lost people to this temptation.

[8 : 51] It's completely understandable in the first century. Just think about it. A very nice ringtone, I must say. Very arresting.

Where were we? Oh, yeah, so think of yourself in the first century. If you came from a Jewish background and then became a Christian, all the privileges of your background suddenly made sense, yeah?

You were even more a child of Abraham, right? It was impossible not to feel confidence in your understanding of God's purposes and to look down on those poor old Gentiles that came out of a pagan background.

But while we may not be tempted by this form of righteousness today, we have modern West Coast forms of righteousness, self-made righteousness. And I've asked people this week, what does our self-made righteousness look like today?

And I'm told this, this is what I've been told, that it's more performative today. Our self-made righteousness today means being on the right side of particular issues.

[10 : 03] Climate change, authenticity, leaning toward activism, promoting our diversity, calling out injustice, signalling your virtue in any way you can.

And although many of these things are very good in themselves and many of them come straight out of the Christian gospel, we do them out of fear of being shunned or cast out or not belonging.

Because righteousness, this word, righteousness is not being a good person.

Righteousness is the list of things, the list of credentials that we look to for acceptance by those we want to be accepted by. It can be accomplishments or skills or qualifications.

It's what we do to belong. If you're a younger person, it's the look, you know, what you look like. It could be aiming for 100,000 followers on Twitter or it could be saying no to Twitter for six months, how people size you up, how smart you are, what sort of music you like.

All of these are good in themselves. Just like Paul's list was good. Look at verses four and five. He had a resume to die for in his context. He lists seven things that give him confidence in the flesh.

[11 : 21] You know, he can name the tribe that he came from, one of the two great tribes that were faithful to the end. He was on the inner circle of Judaism. He was in deep.

And this wasn't just performance. He was deeply committed. In fact, he led the killing of Christians because he believed that they were spreading heresy. I'll never go soft, he said to himself.

And in verse six, he culminates it by saying, as to righteousness under the law, blameless, which doesn't mean that he's sinless, but under the law, which had provisions for forgiveness, he was without fault.

And again, none of these things are bad in themselves except for persecuting Christians. But the day Christ revealed himself to him, all of that changed.

And Paul saw that all his self-made righteousness was keeping him from the righteousness from God. Verse eight, Do you know our English polite translation there, the word rubbish is the Greek word for excrement.

[12 : 38] Yeah. He says, all our self-made righteousness, that's what it's worth. Why? Because it blinds me from seeing and from receiving the righteousness from God.

When he meets Christ, Paul realizes that his self-made righteousness, just like ours, is an attempt to play God. It's an attempt to control my life, to be my own savior.

He was trying to put God in his debt. And when you put God in your debt, it means there's a limit to what he can ask you for. But when he met Christ on that Damascus road, as we saw in the play, it wasn't that brilliant, that play.

I just loved that. I couldn't figure out whether I should laugh or cry when Paul was being stoned.

Here is the thing, when Paul met Christ on that Damascus road, the thing that he'd been giving himself to, the whole self-made program, revolted him.

Some people come to Jesus Christ like the prodigal son from a long way away. You know, they throw themselves into indulgence without care or consequences.

[13 : 54] But most people don't. Before the apostle was a Christian, he was a Pharisee. He was an outwardly good person, a lawyer, a law keeper, responsible neighbor. When he was a Pharisee, if he failed, he would confess his sins, repent and confess his sins, and then go back to building his self-made righteousness.

But when he met Christ, he realized that not only he needed to repent of his sins, he needed to repent of his self-made righteousness. That the only credentials that could please God were Jesus Christ's, which incredibly God is willing to give away free.

And that unleashed a joy in him that nothing in this life could take away. God owed him nothing.

God gives him and he gives us what we don't deserve.

And here is the thing, God will save us single-handedly. He doesn't need our help. It's all grace. It's all mercy. And that's what it is to start the Christian life.

We do not just have to repent of our sins. We have to repent of our self-made righteousness. And I wonder if you've done that. Or I wonder if you've just repented of your sins and now are busy trying to build your own righteousness.

[15 : 14] And the test is this. Are you able to treat others as genuinely better than yourselves? And does joy bubble up in your hearts when you focus on Christ?

I say this because this is a constant, ongoing temptation for us. We are addicted to the way we make our own self-righteousness. It's so much easier to cover up my sense of self-inadequacy by my credentials and by my performance than it is than trusting Christ.

You know, receiving the gift of Christ's righteousness is so much more risky. It means there's no limit to what God can ask me to do. It means finding my life by losing my life.

And when I choose to lose everything to Christ, then I'll be found in him. And if you're still building your self-made righteousness, you'll never see the grace of God and you'll never be able to have this joy that Paul is talking about.

That's why Christ Jesus is the key. We cannot build our lives on Christ and our self-made righteousness at the same time. Our self-made righteousness doesn't bring us to Christ.

[16:25] It doesn't keep us in Christ. It gradually makes something else more important than Christ. And it can be anything in your life and when I lose that thing, I'm devastated.

But when I receive that righteousness of Jesus Christ and I'm found in him and I come to know him, I can be hurt, I can be criticized, I can be discouraged, I can lose something precious.

I can say, I stumble and fall but since God accepts me in Jesus Christ, I have that righteousness from God, he still sees me in Jesus Christ. And that is the very start of the Christian life and this is what we have to come back to daily, you and I, every day, if we're to grow in joy.

This is what it means to know the surpassing worth of Jesus Christ. So secondly, what is the ongoing experience of the Christian life today?

And this is much more brief. How does the surpassing worth of Jesus Christ affect us ongoingly? And the Apostle tells us that there's a two-sidedness to the Christian experience.

[17:33] The first is a radical satisfaction in knowing Jesus Christ. This is very important. Being known and knowing one another today is very elusive.

To know Christ Christ and to be known by Christ is to be vulnerable to him and it brings to us the deepest possible satisfaction. It is like drinking living water.

It is like eating the bread of heaven. What does it look like now? Verse 10. The Apostle Paul says, Paul is talking about the genuine daily experience of what it is to know Christ.

And what he wants to experience is the power of the resurrection. Really? This is the great power of the last day when God will reverse the curse of death and make a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Paul says, that's the power I want to know day by day. Really, we say? You're in prison in chains? Great chain scene on the camera there. I think we have to keep it in context.

[18:56] Look at the rest of the verse. It's through the power of the resurrection, Paul says, that I come to share the fellowship of his sufferings being formed into his death.

He's talking about the daily work of taking up our cross, of living out a cross-shaped life, becoming increasingly like Jesus, his Lord.

So knowing Jesus and the power of his resurrection doesn't mean we'll all become super saints. It will no longer struggle with sin and weakness and disease. It doesn't mean we'll be translated to a higher plane where we can begin looking down on others again.

The power of the resurrection is making us like Jesus in his death. It doesn't mean we become instantly holy or wise, but we daily suffer with him to be made like him.

And suffering includes my own sin. I constantly want to go back to my old credentials and dust them off and begin to have a little bit of confidence in them again.

[20:01] But the power to keep going, to keep trusting Christ and not ourselves, to keep praying when I don't feel like it, to treat others better than myself when they're so annoying, comes out of the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ.

And that is the first sign of ongoing Christian maturity. It's coming to this satisfaction, growing satisfaction in Christ. But there is a second sign of the growing Christian life.

If the first is radical satisfaction, the other side is radical dissatisfaction. It's the sense that there's got to be more. Once you taste the living water of Jesus Christ, you want more.

This is the best sort of hunger and dissatisfaction. Once you really come to experience his grace, you want more of that mercy. You can't get enough of his goodness.

You know, the one who emptied himself for us and humbled himself to death for us. You know, you might think at this point in his career, the Apostle Paul could retire and take it easy.

[21:10] I mean, he's met Christ. He's preached Christ across the Roman Empire. He's suffered for Christ. But the surpassing worth of Jesus Christ drives him on in his dissatisfaction in hot pursuit of knowing Christ more.

Verse 12. Not that I've already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

You know, you should never give the impression that there's nothing more to learn, that there are no new adventures in Christ, that you can settle down.

So we press on to make it our own because Christ Jesus has made me his own. We have been gripped by grace and so we try to grip his grace.

We grasp hold of him. But my hold on Christ is based on his hold of me. And the way we know that Christ is real to us is that as we try to grip him, what matters most is not everything else but Jesus Christ.

[22 : 19] So that the Christian life is not about adding a little bit of knowledge. It's not about closing my eyes and surrendering. It's not even applying what I know.

It's the reality that Christ has made himself known to me and through him I have that righteousness from God. And brothers and sisters, this gives us the highest possible ambition.

Last two verses, 13 and 14. Paul says, One thing I do. Finally, he's come to one thing I do.

Forgetting what lies behind, straining forward to what lies ahead.

I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. This is the one thing he wants. Above everything else. To press forward to the full knowledge of Jesus Christ.

I find this very helpful personally. And I hope you do too. The way we do that is we forget what lies behind. All your success and credentials.

[23 : 20] All your sins and failures. You know, we all know what it's like living by looking over the shoulder, paralyzed by regret, guilt, or even thinking about your past successes.

The key to moving forward in Christ is forgetting what lies behind. But focusing again on the surpassing worth of Christ and the righteousness from God. It's hunting more of Christ.

You know, I finish with this. In John's Gospel, Jesus offers himself to us in a number of pictures. He offers himself to us as the water of life. As the bread of life.

As the resurrection and the life. And when we come to taste Jesus Christ, it's the best thing. We know it's thirst quenching. But we, and we do not want to go back to the toxic water of our self-made righteousness.

But every one of these pictures that Jesus makes and uses are about ongoing, daily recurring experiences in this life.

[24 : 25] You don't get a one-off vaccination or immunization of Jesus. It's a constant depending and drinking, receiving and grasping. Before we came to know Christ, we were discontented materially, but satisfied, even complacent spiritually.

After Christ is born in us and God gives us a new heart, we become contented materially, but discontented with our spiritual situation. So we are strange people, we Christians.

We have this profound sense of satisfaction and this profound sense of dissatisfaction. We hunger to know more. We feel we've not arrived. That we've only just begun. And that's the best form of dissatisfaction.

Because it drives us back to Jesus Christ, who is our righteousness and our wisdom, our hope, our life, our joy. Amen. Let's kneel for prayer.

Let's kneel for prayer.