

Phil 1:1-16 - Taking Stock

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Date: 01 January 2017

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- [0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- This morning we're going to look at Philippians chapter 3. I'd like to read the first three, the first 16 verses.
- Philippians 3, beginning at verse 1, and I'll read down through verse 16. 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.
- [1 : 07] 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.
- As to the law, a Pharisee.
- As to zeal, a persecutor of the church. And 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.
- [2 : 08] 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. 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. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own.
- But one thing I do. Forgetting what lies behind. And straining forward to what lies ahead. I press on towards the goal.
- [3 : 10] For the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way. And if anything you think otherwise. God will reveal that also to you.
- Only let us hold true to what we have attained. One of these days my voice will clear.
- At least in theory. You know, this is the time of year where. And I've been, you see it. I've been seeing it on social media. And seeing it all over the place.
- It's just that time of year where we all kind of want to take stock. Of, you know, looking back on the last year. How's it gone?

And thinking ahead to the new year. You know, and this is why at this time of year. We make New Year's resolutions. We don't make Fourth of July resolutions.

[4 : 10] We make New Year's. Because it's the end of the old beginning of something new. And I know that there's a lot of different thoughts and ideas about resolutions.

Some people just don't like to make resolutions. You know, some people do every year. Some people don't think much of them. Because it seems almost like an exercise in futility.

And I use that word exercise. Because it's probably one of those very common themes in some of our resolutions. You know, it's the season that if you watch television, you're going to see.

Really, you've already seen it. The exercise machine advertisements are going to multiply. All the diet programs are going to multiply.

And you're going to see that heavy on TV. And then what that's going to do, it's going to last for a little bit. But it's actually going to supply eBay with a lot of new merchandise come February.

[5 : 18] Because, you know, it just doesn't get us very far. The self-help section in the bookstore and on Amazon is by far the most popular.

But again, where does it get us? You know, regardless of hair color, exercise, makeup, diets, or spandex if the diets don't work.

Or hair transplants, self-management techniques, or other self-help. All that does for most of us is just increase our frustration with life.

And so, New Year's resolutions are really a waste of time. And besides, we're grace people. God loves us unconditionally.

And he accepts us exactly the way we are. So, here you have it. That said, you know, if I don't have any resolve to be different, maybe I've gotten too content with this broken self that I am.

[6 : 47] You know, maybe I've come to the point where I've got this very unhealthy sense of contentment for sinful patterns in my life.

Ways that I damage relationships and other wasteful things. Yes, I am to accept myself fully as I am, as the broken self that I am.

That is very true. But yet, am I to be content? The Bible says, be content in all circumstances. But does that mean that I have to be content in all of this junk that still seems to run rampant through my life?

I think the gospel calls me to something different. Yes, the gospel says it calls me just as I am.

And I am embraced just as I am. But the gospel comes never to leave me as I am. The gospel comes to take me somewhere.

[8 : 17] And God, because what Christ has come to do in his work of redemption is to make all things new and all things includes me.

And he's not waiting until the last day when he comes again and I enter into heaven. The process has begun.

And it's continuing. And so this is his desire for me. And I love in this passage how Paul marries two glorious concepts.

He marries this idea of my full acceptance and embracing of the Father through the work of Christ alone.

That I am righteous in Christ. He takes that concept and then weds it with a passion to be something different.

[9 : 25] Because you see, in the first part of this chapter, there's a lot of passive ideas, passive concepts where he wants to be found in the righteousness of Christ.

Not because of my works, but I want to be found in Christ. But then as soon as this, in his next breath, he says, I press on. And so how does all this work?

Well, this is what I want us to look at in this passage this morning. And so I want us to see a couple of things. First, we are going to look at this reality of Christ.

The reality of who we are because of the work of Christ alone. But then secondly, we're going to look at then the resulting call to pursue Christ.

And then finally after that, we're going to look at at least I'm going to give you a window into some personal resolutions that I think flow from these words of Paul.

[10 : 37] First, let's look at the reality of being in Christ. You know, in the first six verses of this chapter, I really, this is one of my favorite chapters in all of Scripture.

Because in these first six verses, what Paul does, he first gives us a warning about some false gospels. In one of those false gospels, the primary one is putting confidence in the flesh.

And that is simply that I'm going to trust me to make everything happen. I'm going to trust me to be good enough. I'm going to trust me to gain my acceptance before God.

And he calls those who promote such a gospel dogs. And he's not using dogs the way we use them, the word.

We use the word dogs as people. He's talking about mongrels. These are beasts that are hated. So we're not talking about your little pet schnauzer.

[11 : 46] This is a junkyard dog who's vicious and will devour you. But then he goes through, starting in verse four, then he goes through his own testimony of how he used to put confidence in the flesh.

And he said, I did it better than anybody. He said, I've got the pedigree. I was a Hebrew of Hebrews. I was no Johnny-come-lately convert. I was, I can trace my lineage all the way back to the tribe of Benjamin.

He said, I was, I was zealous for the faith. But then he makes this statement and he says, as to the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

How many of you could say that about yourself? Blameless? Not me.

Paul was the goodest of the good. But then he makes this amazing statement.

[13 : 06] He said he found something else. In all of this other stuff, he said, I counted his loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ.

And what was it he found in Christ? He found righteousness or rightness.

He was right. He was good. He was perfect. He was beautiful. He was as he should be. That's righteousness.

And he found that in Christ. Not in his own works. Not in what he did. He found it through faith. It was passive.

It was something he received. That he was in Christ right. It means he was good enough.

[14 : 07] It means he was beautiful enough. It means he was perfect enough that he would have God's full acceptance, approval, and delight.

Wow. Wow. You know what? I'm not right. And I'm not. Just in and of myself. And I think this is the common experience for all of us.

We feel guilty. When we do things or when we don't do things, when we fail to keep up that standard, we know. We sense it down inside.

We're not right. But it's not just that. There's something else. It's not just guilt that makes us feel not right. It's shame.

Because you go and look in the mirror in the mornings and you, what you see looking back at you is not right. You see all the flaws, all the mistakes, places where there used to be hair and now you see places where there is hair where there shouldn't be.

[15 : 22] And you, you see parts sagging out and, but that's just the physical. And we work hard at hiding all of that. But it's also that behavior, the words that we say, the things that we do, we're just not right.

And we know it. So what do we do with that? Well, our options are basically two.

The first one is you fix it yourself. You become right. You change your behavior to be good. You fix all the flaws so that you can be beautiful.

Or you just try to cover them over and deny that they're there. It's kind of the Photoshop approach to life. that at least I can make a good impression out there for everyone else to see.

I can fix myself well enough that when people look at me, they'll approve and accept me. But we still know the truth.

[16 : 37] It doesn't get us very far. It doesn't get us very far. There's another option. You can get it from somebody else.

And this is what Paul did. As good as he was and as well as he did, he could not be good enough.

He could not stand before God and say, I've done enough. But what he could do is he could stand before God with what he received.

You see, he was clothed with rightness. It was kind of like being covered with all of your dirt and your filth and your dirty clothes and ragged pants and shirt.

All of that is covered with glorious, beautiful wedding garments that you didn't make, you didn't purchase, were given to you and were put on you by another.

[17 : 43] And now, in those garments, we're beautiful. In that rightness, I am beautiful.

It's amazing, isn't it? It's amazing, isn't it? It's amazing. It's amazing. It's amazing. That's who we are in Christ. That's what we get from Christ and we receive it by faith.

That is the gift, the surpassing value of knowing Christ that I can quit working. I can quit covering up. I can just enjoy the pleasure and delight and approval and acceptance of this holy God.

And that's the gospel. It has nothing to do with what we do. It has nothing to do with what we can earn. It's everything to do with Christ.

Coming to Christ means I simply quit this self-centered, self-focused, self-sufficient, self-justification. And I rest in a righteousness which is given to me that is enough and will always be enough.

[19 : 13] And I'll never be, when I get to heaven and stand before Christ, I will not then be more righteous than I am right now. And it's all because of Christ.

Think about that. Every time I think about this, it just, it blows me away because when I look back at all my failure, all of the crud that I can see, especially you take stock and look back over a whole year and there's plenty there.

But God, the Holy One, looks upon me with delight. He's not. He's pleased.

because of Christ. And we have to get this. This cannot be diluted.

If we don't get this, we miss everything. I stand before God and I am pleasing to him because someone else was righteous and gave that credit to me.

[20 : 35] Now, that is glorious. But Paul doesn't stop there. He moves on.

That truth, that wonderful theology does something to Paul. It doesn't make him just sit back on his laurels and do nothing.

It drives him. It energizes him for a whole new work, a whole new pursuit.

And it's not something that's from self-effort. It's something else inside of him that is now driving him. And I think, I want to call our attention, especially as we look now in verses 12 down through verse 16.

There's four things I want us to see about what is now at work in Paul. And the first thing is there's a new calling. Look what he says.

[21 : 43] He talks about this upward call of God which is in Christ Jesus. I am called to something new. He is called out of the old.

But he's called to something. And this is where I may have used this illustration before but I love fairy tales because they reflect realities of, I think, even some spiritual realities, some hopes that we have.

And one of my favorite in this is Cinderella. Cinderella lived in the ash heap with these three ugly brutal stepsisters. But she was called to something new.

She was called out of that world. She was now called to live in the palace. She was called to be the bride of the prince himself.

To have nothing more to do with the ash bin. It says, and in Christ I am now the bride.

[23 : 01] I am more beautiful than Cinderella ever dreamed of. Because I'm with the prince.

I am called to be like him. I am called to serve him. I am called to reflect his glory. And let me tell you something. This is not laborious. If you would have asked Cinderella, what do you want to do?

She says, I want to be with him. Because he's totally changed my life. So there's this new calling out of the old to glory.

Because we are now wedded to the glorious prince. You know, I experienced this somewhat when I got married to my wife, my bride, a little over 34 years ago.

34 and a half years ago. Because I know for, when you think about weddings for so many, you have the night before the wedding, these bachelor parties and so forth.

[24 : 10] And they're almost kind of like wakes. It's kind of a last ditch thrill session before you take on the bondage of marriage.

So it's this, we're going to celebrate, you know, these last moments of freedom. We're going to have fun because that's all going to end tomorrow. I'm sorry.

I never had one of those. And I didn't want one. Because I wanted to be with her. There was no, this was no labor.

This is no bondage. This was a fulfillment of the dreams of my life. life. And it still is.

And so, for me to give myself to her alone and now say no to everyone else, to say no to just a life of self-focus, I'm not complaining.

[25 : 36] Because it's the great joy of my life. And when we come to Christ, this is the call to a glorious wedding where our prince is the fulfillment of every desire.

Secondly, there is this new focus. Paul says in verse 13, he says, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead.

I love these verbs. As you read through this, look at the verbs. He's straining. He's not just leaning. He's not just looking. He's straining.

You know, this is how he describes his new calling, this upward call. His focus is no longer on the past, but it's all on what's to come.

And it's the past, you know, we can think of it in two different ways. That past is, okay, I no longer look on the negative. I no longer look on the bad and all of that that's behind me.

[26 : 49] It's done. It's forgiven. But there's something else I turn away from. I don't look on my successes either. You know, I can go back in time and relive those glorious moments and you have them too.

Those moments where you experience just a taste of glory. Like for me, it was that backwards, over the top, catch the ball in the air, slam dunk, goal on a foosball table.

The very last shot I took as I was leaving World Harvest Mission, I left in glory. And I can relive that and obviously I do.

I do. I do. I do. I do. I do. It doesn't count for anything anymore because I've got something else.

The past, the negative is resolved in Christ. And even what was positive is swallowed up in righteousness which is far, far more profitable and glorious.

[28 : 21] So all of that, all that I would count as valuable, it's nothing now because I'm looking forward to what I have in Christ.

That is my goal. That is my identity. And to that I strain. thirdly, there's a new passion in Paul.

In these verses, twice he uses the same word. He says, I press on. And that word is a strong word.

It's a little stronger than what's communicated in English. And especially since this is a great football weekend, this is, the way I think of this word is that that pressing on is kind of the gleam in the eye of a defensive end with a quarterback in his sight.

And there's nothing going to stop him from getting there. That is the passion now that is driving Paul to press on.

[29 : 29] He has one thing in mind. Notice there again he says, one thing I do. Just one. And basically this is a new love.

It's a new heart passion. And that's where Paul's getting his energy. And that's what's driving him. We are driven by our loves. We're not driven by our thoughts, but the things that we love drive us.

And Paul now had one love. fourthly, there's new resources. And you have to step back to verse 10. He says, I want to know him and the power of his resurrection.

And in that power, that's the same power now working in Paul that raised Christ from the dead. And a lot of times we think that we are beyond change.

I have tried to change year after year, month after month. I'm getting nowhere. I can't do it, but the Holy Spirit himself, the one who brought Christ up from the dead, now dwells in me, and I think I can't change.

[30 : 57] See, for Paul, he knew it wasn't up to him. But he had a resource that now he could turn to. In all of these things, this new calling, this new focus, new passion, in this new resource, it's not just true of Paul.

It's true of every one of us in Christ. So, what does it mean? What does this mean for me? I'll try to go through these quickly.

But that's probably one resolution I won't fulfill. First, there's three things. I need to develop a healthier discontentment.

I need to develop a healthier discontentment with myself, with where I am, and what I'm doing. I need to more fully comprehend the things that I love, and the things that I love that are worthless and cheap.

Paul says in verse eight, he says, I count everything as a loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. He said, for his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish.

[32 : 30] That word rubbish is a four-letter word. And it describes something you would flush down a toilet. And that's the value he gives all of his past accomplishments.

And there are a lot of things that I am pursuing in my life that smell bad. And I need to know. This last fall, I'm given some insight into some of these things.

One of the things the Lord has begun to show me, well, not show me for the first time, this is a long running issue with me, is that I can be very, very, very arrogant.

To the point which I will, any group of people, in order for me to get attention and recognition and acknowledgement, even just by way of a few laughs, I'll throw you under the bus.

I'll put you down, I'll belittle you, and I'm not proud of that. I hate it. I grieve over it.

[33 : 53] But that revelation is a gift. Because what he's showing me is that there's this value that I have is rubbish.

And we need to get rid of it. And so I think I need more of this. How and when we're going to do this? Well, one of the things that I need to do is a practice that I did some years ago.

I need to have people praying for me. Some of you think in your resolutions you need to start praying more. Well, that might be, and we'll talk about that in a second, but I need people praying for me.

I need to go out and enlist a few people who will faithfully pray that God would make me very, very discontent with who I am until I get to the perfection of Christ.

Second thing, I need to develop a healthier obsession. And that obsession needs to be with Jesus. you know, what I find is that I'm willing, you know, I fill my life with so many things, so many worthless things.

[35 : 16] I mean, they're not bad in themselves, but they're just, they're not the best. And so I need this year, I need more and more to fill my eyes, to fill my mind, to fill my vision with glory.

Real glory. So what does that mean? Well, how do I do that? Well, it probably means that I start reading my Bible from my Bible and not from my iPad.

The iPad is great, especially the older you get, you can make that text really big. but there's too many things on there that are distracting, that take my attention, that again are not evil in themselves, but when they capture the love of my heart, they've become evil.

people. So, I need to probably put that away and get back to filling my mind, my eyes, with the vision of the beauty of Christ.

To read more from people who also see this beauty. Finally, the third thing is I need to develop a healthier dependence.

[36 : 50] A dependence on the power of God to transform. And this is something I, like many of you, have trouble believing. You know, if I'm honest, this is where I struggle because, like you, I have tried to change.

I have tried to reform my life. I have tried to do better in a lot of these areas. And sometimes, when I don't see a whole lot of success, I get very cynical.

I have tried to do better in a way. I have tried to do better in a way. I have tried to do better in a way. The problem is, though, it's me that I've been trusting and not him.

And so, instead of determining myself what must be done and determining that I myself will make it happen, I need a different outlook. work. It's not up to me.

But I am not helpless. And I have not been abandoned to myself. I have the spirit. And to him, I need to more often, more constantly turn in prayer and dependence that he might come and do in me what he desires to do.

[38 : 14] and then rest in his work. So how am I going to see all this happen?

If it's just me, it won't. But it has to start here. That I am in Christ.

I am righteous. I am pleasing. I have been drawn near. I have been approved. He accepts me. And I am the delight of his heart.

Because I am his bride. And that has to capture my heart.

So that now me, the bride, who is totally overcome by the love of my bridegroom, I want nothing more than him.

[39 : 32] May this year, may God through his spirit, give me a greater sense of him. And I hope he'll do it for you too.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for your grace. thank you for your love. Help us to comprehend it more fully.

That you would have our hearts holy to yourself. Because it's only in you that we will find the joy that you've promised. Thank you, in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.