

Partners Confident in Christ

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[0 : 00] Where is Judson? So sleeping quietly. So I better not do anything to disturb him. Okay, let's bow our heads and pray. Heavenly Father, we pray that as we come to your word now, as I preach it, that you would speak to us by your spirit, that you would grow us in Christ, and that you would help us to stand firm in Christ, holding onto the righteousness that you have given to us in him.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Who am I? You put your hand up quietly if you think you get this one. And if you're at the first service, you're not allowed to say.

I was one of three brilliant brothers, all trained at Eton and Cambridge in England. The three of us were in the Eton Rowing 11 in the same year.

I was described as the best all-round English batsman in my day. My brothers and I were all converted to Christ independently on the same day.

Well done, well done, Vanda. I played with other notables, such as W.G. Grace. I was part of the English team which lost to Australia in 1882, and the Sporting Times published the following epitaph after the match.

[1 : 20] In affectionate remembrance of English cricket, which died at the Oval on the 29th of August, 1882. Deeply lamented by a large circle of sorrowing friends and acquaintances.

R.I.P. Note well, the body will be cremated and the ashes taken to Australia. That was a lie, wasn't it? They've kept them. I inherited a large fortune.

I gave it all away and became a missionary to China. I was distinctive because I was amongst the first missionaries to try to take on the culture of the people that I was trying to witness to.

My name is C.T. Studd. The biography of C.T. Studd is the story of a man who became passionate about his faith. In human terms, he had it all before him.

He had wealth. He had popularity. He had great sporting ability and he had brains. And probably things that we crave for our children.

[2 : 21] And he turned to Christ and he was no longer satisfied with what he had and he was no longer satisfied with what most people crave for. When his brother nearly died, C.T. Studd wrote this.

He said, All those things that had become as nothing to my brother, all those things had become as nothing to my brother, he only cared about the Bible and the Lord Jesus Christ.

And God taught me the same lesson. And in his love and goodness, he restored my brother to health. And as soon as I could get away, I went to hear Mr. Moody.

And there the Lord met me again and restored to me the joy of his salvation. And still further and what was better than all, he sent me to work for him and I began to try to persuade my friends to read the gospel and to speak to them individually about their souls.

And I cannot tell you what joy it gave me to bring my first soul to the Lord Jesus Christ. I have tasted almost all the pleasures that this world can give and I do not suppose that there is one that I have not experienced.

[3 : 37] But I can tell you that those pleasures were as nothing compared to the joy that the saving of one soul gave me.

So the Bible passage I'm preaching this morning and was just read is Philippians chapter 3 and it begins with these words, Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.

And it's a call which comes several times in Philippians. It's there again in chapter 4. Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again, rejoice. Rejoice in the Lord.

And it's not really like this call to happy, clappy feelings. It's a call to the deep joy that comes from a thriving life lived in faithful service to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Last week I spoke about Philippians chapter 2, not in this service but at 8.30, and God calling us to a life of humble service of him. Verse 3, chapter 2, And that is the life that we are called to live in response to the humble service, the humility of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[4 : 56] He is the one who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the nature of a slave, and he humbled himself and became obedient to death on a cross.

And so really in simple terms, a simple summary, our wonderful saviour left the safety of heaven, was executed by his creatures, and God lifted him back into heaven and gave him the name which is over every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Christian joy comes from receiving and following the humble servant-heartedness of the Lord Jesus Christ. One of the themes of this letter to the Philippians is that not only has God humbled himself, Paul and his team have humbled themselves, and we are to humble ourselves if we are to be true partners of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 2 is a real change in tone, and it contains a passionate warning. It says, Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh, for it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh. It's a pretty ugly contrast. It's a hot denunciation of a group whose teaching and ways pose a considerable threat to the Christians in the early church, and especially here at Philippi.

[6 : 44] The enemy is not identified, but what they teach is. They could be some zealous Jews who are forcing their true blue Judaism in the face of Christianity, or perhaps they are Christians like some of the Christians in the early church in Jerusalem who do not know yet, or don't yet know how to let go of their Jewish ways, and are pushing them against the international believers.

When he says, Watch out, it means consider carefully their ways and beware of them.

They are a formidable enemy who needs careful watching. Their beliefs might not seem so bad, but they are a disaster to Christian faith. They're people who probably take away from Christ as the centre, and they might be pushing law, and they might be pushing Ten Commandments, and they're certainly pushing circumcision, but they are not pushing Christ.

And he calls them dogs, men who do evil, the mutilation. They're great words to bandy around the church, aren't they? Don't really encourage you to do that at morning tea.

But he's using biting irony, and he is ripping apart those who are trying to push their Judaism against Christ. The things that they are proud of, he tears apart.

[8 : 14] He calls them dogs. These are people in the church or around the church who think of themselves as clean, who think of themselves as the holy people of God, and he calls them dogs, unclean animals, unable to come anywhere near a holy God.

People who do evil, not keepers of God's holy laws, the mutilation, a clear reference to circumcision, not a sign of consecration to God. A little bit hard for us to identify, but it's almost like coming into a church where people are not really on about Christ, but they're on about tradition, and they're on about the outward things, and so people might be saying to you, I've been baptised, I've been confirmed, I've been ordained, and Paul is ripping in and saying, just because you've got the outward things doesn't make you holy at all.

And it's a tremendous insult. He castigates what they're preaching. He wants believers to understand how wrong these peddlers of religion are. And he contrasts it with true Christian faith, and he reassures the Christians with the words in verse 3, these guys haven't got it outwardly perhaps, but they've got it inwardly, and he says, we are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh.

We mightn't have it outwardly, but we do have God's grace inwardly. Don't be put off, friends. When we cling to Christ, we have what it means to be truly circumcised.

We do worship by the Spirit of God. We don't trust in our own religious acts or achievements. I think I had the experience very early in my Christian life.

[9 : 54] I came to Christ in February, and by the middle of the year, I was really actively involved in my local church, and probably three-quarters of the way through the year, I was also involved in the Christian group at New South Wales University, which in those days was student life, or one of them was.

And we would get together in small groups. We'd go out witnessing. We'd have our big group meeting through the week. But one of the things that also happened is pastors would come in from churches sometimes to get alongside and encourage the students.

And one of the men who came alongside us seemed like a guru. He was from an independent Baptist church. He was an older man. He was opening up the scriptures. But on reflection, he was always opening things to us like the book of Revelation and the book of Daniel.

And explaining the end times and how everything was going to work out. And we were sort of goggle-eyed in amazement, wondering how it was going to happen, and marvelling at the wisdom of this man.

And I was a young Christian who had outwardly changed. And my friends knew I'd changed. My family knew I'd changed. And I was eager to speak about the Lord Jesus Christ.

[11 : 04] And this man discovered one day that I was an Anglican. And I'd been baptised as a baby. And he asked me if I'd been baptised.

And I said, oh yeah, I think I was baptised as a baby. And he said, no, you haven't been baptised properly. And he pushed that line over a period of time and actually became a considerable stumbling block to me and my faith.

Because I was a young, tender-hearted Christian, eager to serve the Lord Jesus and do what he wanted me to do. And this man was actually, started to say to me that I was a disobedient believer who wasn't honouring the Lord Jesus Christ by doing the externals right.

And it's a longer story how God brought me out of that, but it took three or four years. And I look back with a different sort of maturity now and think that my brother, as well-meaning as he was, threw a considerable stumbling block at my feet.

Paul is passionate and strong here. These are people who look religious and may be intimidating to the people of God, but they actually pull people away from Christ at the centre.

[12 : 28] And he comes back and he says even more, verses four to six. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put 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. In regard to the law, a Pharisee.

As for zeal, persecuting the church. As for legalistic righteousness, faultless. He says, I know about these things.

I know what I'm talking about. If anybody's a true blue Jew, I am. Cut in the flesh. On the right day. In the right way. An Israelite. From the tribe of the first king, Saul.

Born of Hebrew parents. He can trace his genealogy. There's no dark skeletons in the closet. He's a Pharisee. He's won by conviction. He's bound himself not only to obey the law of Moses, but also the hundreds of commandments contained in the oral law.

[13 : 34] He's absolutely faultless in keeping the legalistic requirements of the Pharisaic regulation. He tithes his mint and cumin. If he was a kid at school, he would have been bringing home achievement awards by the bucket load, and we would have been praising him for it.

He was a very, very good man. He's proved his zeal by being a persecutor of the followers of Christ.

In Acts, Paul was there nodding with approval as Stephen was stoned to death. Paul was standing there thinking, this is a righteous thing to do. And so as a Jew, he is as good as they come.

Faultless. He had it all. One of the Bible study questions this week is to write your own pedigree. Write your own religious CV.

So I'll give you mine. Baptised by Bishop Dudley Ford in 1958. Something I remember well. Not. Confirmed by the Bishop of Grafton before I came to Christ.

[14 : 50] That worked, didn't it? Nurtured amongst a wonderful group of believers, Christian believers at Narrabeen. Tutored in the scriptures at Mork Theological College by Archbishop Peter Jensen.

Ordained deacon by Archbishop Donald Robinson. Ordained presbyter by Archbishop Harry Goodhue. Numbers of years in full-time Christian ministry at Currajong and Normanhurst and Macquarie Fields and Weewall and Norwest and now at Chatswood.

Those of you who are believers, you can write your own. But then he writes, whatever was to my profit, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

And what is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For whose sake I have lost all things.

I consider them rubbish 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 is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

[16:04] Our English Bible softened the impact of these words. Whatever was to my profit, I now consider rotting, stinking garbage for the sake of Christ.

I consider them dung that I may gain Christ. It's a load of crap. It's as bald as that, what it says in the scripture.

I've invested in junk bonds that have taken me backwards and not forwards. Knowing God, knowing Christ, becoming righteous has nothing to do with the life that we live.

It is a gift of God which only comes through faith in Jesus Christ. He was an outstanding Jew.

Very religious man. astonishing pedigree. And by the grace of God, he was brought to Christ and he was able to look back at his past and see that everything he did to please God was an absolute and total waste in terms of knowing him.

[17:20] Rubbish, dung, stinking garbage. The things that he used to glory in, the things that made him a big man in other people's eyes, actually made him less in God's economy.

And that's why he's so opposed to these peddlers of religion. Dogs, doers of evil, mutilators of flesh. They're peddling a way of pleasing God which was totally focused on the life that we live, wearing the right badge, keeping the law which cannot be kept, having the right surgery, it's all outward human observance.

Stuff that can be seen. They're focused on the outward, they're not focused on the inward. And Paul has been through a reversal. God has turned him around in his tracks.

He's come to know Christ. He's been brought face to face with him. He's come to see that you can only become acceptable to God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Total dependence on him and on what he has done to save us.

We trust him. For our salvation. And that's where the rubber really hits the road for you and me. The new St. Pauls, we are the new St. Pauls.

[18:36] Steve used that expression the other week in the Vision Sunday service. It's made up of people with a long, proud evangelical history which goes back more than 100 years.

And we are also a young, ethnically diverse church with hope who became the new St. Pauls in January this year. And the combined experience of all our members brings much to thank God for. So, you know, across our body, we've taught scripture and Sunday school and we've knocked on doors and we've done evangelism in the mall and we've served full time on parish council and we've looked after the grounds and given generously and preached and led services and we've cleaned and served and given and we've worked hard for God's church.

We've been baptised. We've been confirmed. We've attended prayer meetings and Bible studies. We've led people to faith in Christ and you name it, we've done it. And if you haven't done it here, you've probably done it in church somewhere else.

And they're all great things to do but when you recite a list like that, like I've just recited a list like that, it really is about what we have done.

[19:50] It's about us. It's a list which is focused on us and our service and we need to be really careful when our eyes are on us and what we have done that the focus has not slipped off Christ.

Paul was warning people who thought of themselves as close to God who were actually a long way from him. That's what the Judaizers had become. You can do the externals and you can actually lose your heart and soul.

It's a terrifying thought. More than anything, the Christian is called to be on about what Christ has done. Not who I am, not what I have done.

He has saved me. He has given me faith. He has made me acceptable to him. He is helping me to grow in righteousness. To him be the praise forever and ever.

Amen. C.T. Studd came to the point early in his life where cricket, national acclaim and even international acclaim no longer satisfied.

[21:05] Even as a Christian. And he was passionate for that greater goal of serving Christ and seeing men and women won to him.

And God brought Paul to a point where he saw that his old ways of pursuing righteousness through the Jewish system were absolutely futile in the face of what Christ had done for him and he turned his back on the lot and his creed became what's written here in verses 10 and 11.

Very personal words. He says, I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings becoming like him in his death and so somehow to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

I think that's a magnificent creed for every one of us. It's not about who we are it's about Christ it's about what he's done it's about what it might cost us to follow him and to know him and in the end we're called to follow his humility we are brought low as we share in his sufferings and our eyes are fixed on the hope of sharing in his resurrection after death.

Not about us it's about Christ it's about us humbling ourselves and giving him the glory. It's an unforgettable moment there was an unforgettable moment at the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta Georgia.

[22 : 47] Australian Samantha Riley was our golden girl and she was the absolute hot favourite to win the gold medal in the women's 200 metre breaststroke event.

It was one of the goals that we were just bound to win. and the South African Penny Haynes beat her in a magnificent race and the Aussie interviewer Channel 7 got to her first out of the pool dripping wet puffing had just finished the race congratulated her on her swim and her first words out of the pool were I just went out there today to try to do my best I put everything into the Lord's hands and he really honoured me today and I give him all the praise they edited those words out of every replay a gold medal victory and her words and her testimony were not focused on what she had done she was centred on Christ and she gave him the glory in a most magnificent moment when

Qantas Flight 32's engine blew up the other night and more than 460 people realised that they could have died in a catastrophe and we have listened to story after story after story being told about that event in the media through this week not once have I heard somebody say thank God for his mercy and kindness and protection in that circumstance it's not about us it's about Christ it's about his glory I think I wonder whether you do something with me this morning and that is to take these words to heart and even to make them your personal creed I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings becoming like him in his death and so somehow to attain to the resurrection from the dead will you say that with me if I say it out loud will you repeat it with me

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings becoming like him in his death and so somehow to attain to the resurrection from the dead I wonder now whether we might just bow our heads and pray about those things in our mind and I'll finish by praying in a minute Heavenly Father we thank you for this most magnificent scripture and for the extraordinary transformation you brought in the life of the apostle Paul and for the way that he could throw all his human achievement and ability and status to the side for the absolute joy of knowing you and we pray Lord Jesus that as men and women at St Paul's Chatswood that we would be people who are absolutely on about your glory who delight to do your will who thrill to know you who deeply desire to grow and know you even deeper and we would pray that from the overflow of our lives that many people would be brought to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ help us to give you glory day by day to realise that every breath we take is by your mercy and that we would live lives of humble service to you Lord Jesus and we pray this in his name and for his sake

[27 : 28] Amen will be who know you want to to come to you