

The Same (Wonderful) Things

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[0 : 0 0] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

You can go ahead and flip in your Bible to Philippians 3, beginning in verse 1. 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.

[1 : 0 3] Verse 5, circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the law of Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

It's the word of God. The clear, sufficient word of God. You know, one of my favorite stories from the well-known 19th century preacher Charles Spurgeon tells about a unique experience ministering alongside his grandfather.

Spurgeon, by many accounts, is the greatest of all preachers. And perhaps this story will give us another indication why. He writes, or I'll tell you this story in his words, not mine.

He says, and I quote, I was announced to preach in a certain country town. It does not often happen to me to be behind time, for I feel that punctuality is one of those little virtues which may prevent great sins.

Some of us may be convicted already. But, just a joke, just a joke. But he continues, but we have no control over railway delays and breakdowns.

[2 : 2 2] And so it happened that I reached the appointed place considerably behind the time. He continues, like sensible people, they had begun their worship and had proceeded as far as the sermon.

As I neared the chapel, I perceived that someone was in the pulpit preaching. And who would be that preacher but my dear grandfather? He saw me as I came in the front door and made my way up the aisle.

And at once he said, here comes my grandson. He may preach the gospel better than I can, but he cannot preach a better gospel. Can you, Charles?

As I made my way through the throng, I answered, you can preach better than I can. Pray, go on. But he would not agree to that.

You've got to just love this scenario. What a joy it would be to be there. He says, I must take this sermon, is what his grandfather said. And so I did. Going on with the subject there and then, just where he left off.

[3 : 25] There, said he, I was preaching, for by grace ye have been saved. Charles continues, I'm so at home with these glorious truths that I can feel no difficulty at all taking from my grandfather the thread of his discourse and joining my thread to it.

As to continue without a break, our agreement in the things of God made it easy for us to be joint preachers of the same sermon. And so the grandson began to preach.

Charles Spurgeon, the prince, began to preach. But a few moments later, Charles felt a pull on his coattail. It was his grandfather who desired to say a bit more.

He got up, took his turn again, Charles says, and for about five minutes, his grandfather preached again. When he had said his say in a very gracious manner, his grandson was allowed to go on to the dear old man's delight.

But listen, but now and then he would say in a gentle tone, good, good, good, good. Once he said, tell them that again, Charles.

[4 : 41] Tell them that again. Charles says, and I did tell them that again. He continues, I seem to hear that dear voice, which has been so long lost to earth, saying to me, tell them that again.

You know, this morning as we open our Bible, the Apostle Paul turns to the Philippians to tell them that again. He turns to tell them the same things they had heard so many times.

Look down there in verse 1, second half. He says, to write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. He turns to tell them the same things about Jesus Christ who came to save sinners.

He comes to tell them the same things about grace and grace alone. He comes to tell them the same things about freedom and joy in Christ. And in so many ways, God invites us to come and hear the same things again.

If Spurgeon's grandfather was here, he would say, tell them that again. Tell them that again. Again, in so many ways, our lives are not ultimately changed by stories and life hacks, but by hearing the same truths preached over us again and again and again till they take deeper root and transform us completely.

[6 : 00] That's the goal of our gathering, to hear the same things and to rejoice in them. In a minute, where we're going is keep on rejoicing in the same things, for they will save your soul.

Keep on rejoicing in the same things, for they will save your soul. Point one is you must not do anything else. You must not do anything else.

You know, our text begins with a transition, or it marks a transition in the letter, which we're in chapter 3 now. Paul begins, finally. You know, one boy allegedly asked his father what the preacher means by finally, and his father said nothing.

So perhaps nothing is what Paul means, right? Finally, at the beginning of chapter 3, he also begins chapter 4 that way, but he's long from finished.

But it seems that this word here is used just to indicate a change in subject. It's often a word translated, so then. So here's Paul's going along, and he's changing the subject, so he's saying, so then.

[7 : 10] He's alerting us that he's moving on from what we had just studied for the past eight weeks or so, how to live in a manner worthy of the gospel. And he turns and addresses a certain people.

Look at verse 2. He says, Look out for the dogs. Look out for the evil doers. Look out for those who mutilate the flesh. He immediately, I mean, we see the change in tone immediately how quickly he addresses this group of people.

And so we have to ask, who are these people? Most likely, they were Judaizers. Now, I don't claim to think you understand completely what they, or who that group is, but they're just a group of people in the first century who taught Gentiles that in addition to believing in Jesus Christ, that they had to obey certain things from the Old Testament law in order to be acceptable to God.

So they would have said, you have to be circumcised in order to be acceptable to God. And if you've read Acts, you've seen Paul interact with these men in a number of places.

And Paul's saying, look out for them. Yeah, I'm tempted to think, wouldn't a little obedience help? What's the big deal, Paul?

[8 : 26] I mean, I could believing and obeying hurt the Gentiles. Nevertheless, Paul says, watch out. They would not come into town wearing black clothes and a hat that says enemies of the gospel.

They would come in offering advice. And that's why Paul is very direct and very blunt. And his directness and bluntness for these guys and the names he calls them uncover how they alter the teachings of the gospel, which is what he's concerned about.

So he calls them the dogs. Look out for the dogs. You know, the dogs in the first century were not man's best friend. You know, they didn't eat better than us like our dogs do in so many ways.

They are gross in the Old Testament days. They're known for feeding on filth and garbage. They're unclean. And they eat unclean things. So what Paul's saying is when you boast about being made clean through obedience to the law, you're just like dogs.

You're unclean and filthy. Do you see? He's taking this word. He's calling them a name that uncovers what they actually are. So he continues. He calls them evil doers.

[9 : 37] The idea is that they work evil. Now, they're focused on what they think is good. They boast about their obedience to the law and call others to obey it as well.

But when they boast about working and obeying the law in addition to believing in Jesus Christ, they're only working evil is what he says. It's not just a mistake or it's not just an exaggeration.

It's evil. That's what he says. He continues and calls them the mutilation. Now, they went around in those days and they boasted that they are the circumcision. They are the ones who are obeying God.

But circumcision, and as you know, the circumcision in the Old Testament was just a way that distinguished God's people from every other people through this act. And so they boast that they have it and teach the Gentiles that they still need it.

But what he says is when you boast about circumcision, when you boast about this outward act, all you're boasting in is a mangling and a mutilating of the flesh.

[10 : 41] So literally, he calls them the mutilation. The idea is that anything they add to the gospel corrupts it and them. And we can hang out on these verses for a long time.

I'm not going to do it. But the point is any work added to the gospel annuls the gospel. Any work added to the gospel makes it void.

Any work added to the gospel causes it to fray and give way. Let me explain. The gospel is not advice. It's news. Tim Keller describes it this way.

He says, advice is counsel about what you must do. News is a report about what has already been done. Advice urges you to make something happen.

News urges you to recognize something that has already happened and to respond to it. Advice says it's all up to you. News says that someone else has acted.

[11 : 41] So what he's saying, what the apostle Paul is saying is that all that they're bringing when they bring you this in addition to the gospel is just advice. But I come and what I proclaim to you was news.

And the gospel is good news because it announces that any sinner can find complete acceptance before God through free grace found in Jesus Christ alone.

Everything's already done. And the good news of the gospel is that now grace can be received freely as a gift. If you try to add to it, you try to pay for it, it would no longer be grace.

It annuls it. Let me give you an illustration. Nearly 13 years ago when Kim and I got engaged, her father said to me, you should now call me by.

By. You're thinking, what the world does that mean? But by means father in Vietnamese. So her father, born and raised in Vietnam, wanted me to call him father and wanted me to use this warm, affectionate word.

[12 : 49] In fact, he tries to insist that Kim calls my father dad, although that hasn't happened yet. See, I can pray for her. But just joking.

Just joking. You know, I think part of it, honestly, he wants me to call him by so that when we're out in the Vietnamese restaurant, he can make fun of me after I, the white man, calls him by. He says, isn't that so great?

They call me by. He's just a white man. But mainly, you know, and if you know her dad, you'll meet him sometime. You would see why, because he's just a ball of fun, big personality.

But mainly, you know, he wanted to extend his generosity to me. To be in Ba's family is to receive his generosity. In fact, he's one of those people that's so generous it makes you uncomfortable.

Have you been around those people? You're just, you're like, stop. You know, you feel like you can't say anything or else he hears about it and wants to meet that need. You know, just a few months into our marriage, Kim and I were living in this tiny apartment in East Knoxville.

[13 : 52] And when Ba came to visit, he heard us musing about how we wanted a grill and promptly went out and bought one. Like, we never asked, you know.

We don't ask most of the time. When we, he visited our first home while I was still at work, mind you. He deemed the yard too large to push and so had a riding lawnmower delivered that day.

Not to mention countless meals, birthday gifts, ice cream cones, and the numerous times he's hunted down Vietnamese food for me late at night.

Many times I've offered to pay. At times I've prevailed. But most often he insists because if I added, it would no longer be a gift. And he almost gets angry about it.

And that's the gist of what Paul is saying. The gospel is all grace because it's all gift. The gospel is all grace because it's all gift. To add to it annuls it.

[14 : 53] To try to improve it empties it of power. To try to make it palatable spoils it. To strengthen it destroys it. The gospel is complete in and of itself. It needs no addition.

It needs no help. It needs to be only received freely by sinners who deserve God's righteous and furious wrath. And so when Paul says, when these Judaizers come into town and they tell you that you must do this or this or this or this, watch out for them.

They're not your friends. And so too, if anyone tells you or insinuates that you must do anything else to be accepted by Jesus Christ, watch out.

Don't believe them. You know, most of us don't set out to add to the gospel. I doubt even these Judaizers set out to add to the gospel in many ways. But we subtly do so when we assume God relates to us differently on good days than on bad ones.

You know, when we have a good day, we take time to read and pray. We serve others. We're joyful. We assume God is eager to bless us because the day is going so well.

[16 : 06] And we assume good is ahead because of all that we're doing. But the reverse is true as well. When we have a bad day, when we don't take time to read and pray, when we're sort of stumbling through the day, when we sin, when we fail, we assume God's stepping back.

We assume that he's withholding his blessing. We assume that something has gone, when something's gone poorly, we wonder, what did I do?

Is there some unconfessed sin in my life? We assume that I've misstepped, and therefore God is finally repaying me as I deserve.

But the gospel says God's love has nothing to do with what you do. It has nothing to do with what you do. You must not do anything else to get God to accept you.

You must not. If you're in Christ, he loves you and accepts you completely, full stops, no additions required, no need of anything else. You know, that will get you out of bed in the morning.

[17 : 25] I encourage you, look yourself in the mirror. Don't say, you are great, you're wonderful. Something like that. Say, you are accepted through Jesus Christ. With all your flaws and all your scars and all your marks and all your shame, you are accepted.

So I am accepted through Jesus Christ. I don't have to do anything to please you and earn your acceptance this morning, you know. You view me just as precious as you view your son because of what he's done for me.

It is life, death, and resurrection. You must not do anything else. Point two, you must not boast in anything else.

Must not boast in anything else. Your gospel tells us we must not do anything else. It also tells us we must not boast in anything else.

The idea is that what sets us apart is not what we do, but what has been done to us and for us. And so it changes what we're all about. It changes what we brag about, you know.

[18 : 33] It changes what we swagger about because we're most excited about what God has done. So he's essentially saying, don't be tripped up by the lie of these guys when they come into town because you have already been acted upon by God.

He says, you are the circumcision. You know, when the opponents in Judaizers argued that circumcision made them the people of God, they were wrong. He says, that's just an outward mark.

That does nothing. He's saying the real people are those whose hearts have been transformed, whose hearts have been circumcised.

Romans 2 picks this up and explains this for us. Look there with me. He says, for 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, not by the letter. His praise is not from man, but from God.

[19 : 32] Do you see the idea of what Paul is saying? It is, you are the circumcision because you're what circumcision was always meant to point to, not to a people that followed some outward external thing, but to a people that have been born again, to a people that have been circumcised from the heart.

So he says, you are the circumcision. You're the ones who worship by the spirit and glory in Christ Jesus.

This is a great slogan. You know, we are the circumcision. We worship by the spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus. This word here for worship is just one used all throughout the Old Testament for acts of worship among God's people.

But here we're in contrast to the Judaizers. The idea is that we worship by the spirit of God. It doesn't mean we worship passionately, which I hope we do. It doesn't mean that we worship fervently with all our heart, which I hope we do.

Worship by the spirit means that we are no longer in the flesh. Worship by the spirit means that we're no longer trying to be cool or hip or impressive.

[20 : 35] We're no longer trying to do these things to be acceptable or impressive to God because we worship by the spirit. Let me explain. Look in Romans 8. Paul, again, writes, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

You, however, are not in the flesh but in the spirit if, in fact, the spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

So what he's saying is these guys that have come into town, they're telling you you need to do these, these, these things to be obedient to God. They're just saying all they're giving you is just fleshly advice.

That make sense? All they're giving you is advice to try to beautify the flesh. But you have been born again by the spirit.

This is meant to be profoundly encouraging. These guys are coming into town, but you don't need their message because you've been born again by the spirit. And this is your boast. Once we were in the flesh and had no hope of pleasing God, but now the spirit of God, the spirit of Jesus Christ dwells in us.

[21 : 49] And that is our worship. It's what makes us different. According to the Christian life is a thoroughly spiritual life.

Paul says in Galatians 5 alone, he says, we walk by the spirit, are led by the spirit, live by the spirit, keep in step by the spirit, sow to the spirit, bear fruit of the spirit, and are continually, according to Ephesians 5, to be filled with the spirit.

Ephesians 5, 18 says, do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the spirit.

Now that's an interesting analogy for the apostle Paul. He's saying there's some correlation between being drunk and being filled with the spirit.

Now, obviously, one correlation he's not trying to make is that there's something mind-inducing, mind-altering, slurring speech, or anything like that that's good.

[23 : 05] But what he is saying is that the spirit should so affect your life and behavior that the evidence of it is visible. It's clear.

It should so affect your life and behavior that at some point someone says, what are you drinking? Remember, in the Pentecost, they thought, man, these guys are mad, you know.

I don't know what is going on. Gordon Fee says it like this. All truly Christian behavior is the result of being spirit people. People filled with the spirit of God, who live by the spirit, walk by the spirit.

Together, they do not picture a person who is drunk on the spirit, as it were, as if there were virtue in that, but a person, and in this case, a community, just like us, whose life is totally given over to the spirit, that the life and deeds of the spirit are as obvious in their case as the effects of too much wine are obvious in the other.

You see? Our boast is not any status or any of these things. Our boast is in this spirit that set us apart. So that we can make much of Jesus.

[24 : 27] So he says, I worship by the spirit and glory in Christ Jesus. As the real people of God made new by the spirit, there's one boast we make, and that's Jesus Christ.

We don't boast in what we do for God. We boast in what God has done for us. And Jesus, it's so natural to boast of what we've done. It's the reflexive response of our hearts to set back and look at what we've done and say, look at what I did.

You know, it's the impulse of a three-year-old who builds something with Legos, but it's the same thing as someone who builds a business. And essentially says, look at what I've done. You know, it's that relentless desire to be seen, noticed, and to receive credit.

But a couple days ago, I re-watched one of my favorite comedians, Brian Regan. He illustrates this thing well in something he calls the me monster.

You know, he's telling this story kind of like you're at a party, and, you know, there's one guy dominating the conversation, telling stories about himself and all the cool things he's done, all the cool things he has, and we all know that guy, right?

[25 : 45] The guy who just keeps going, going, and going about me, myself, and I. Now I, myself, me, me, myself, and I. They just keep going, and they're just like churning out all their stories.

And the way he describes it, it's just totally great. He says, you try to jump in and tell a story, you know, because you just don't want to listen to this guy all night long, right? Maybe you break in saying something, you'll never believe what happened to me.

And maybe you tell him your story about getting two wisdom teeth extracted, and how painful it was, and the dry sockets you got. He said, but before you're even done, that guy says, that ain't nothing.

I had four wisdom teeth impacted, dry sockets galore, you know? You know, maybe you try to tell something about a sunrise hike in the Smokies, and he blows you off to tell you about hiking through the Himalayas.

And that's the way it is. Whether it's in dinner parties or regular conversations, our hearts can be grasping out for something to boast in.

[26 : 50] And the endless refrain of false worship in our straying culture is boast in you. But the heartbeat of the Christian life is boast in Jesus. How many of us were wise?

How many of us were of noble birth? How many of us were strong? God chose what was foolish in the world, the shame of the wise.

God chose what was weak in the world, the shame of the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even the things that are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

Because of Him, we are in Christ Jesus. So let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord. Point three, you must not rest in anything else.

You must not rest in anything else. Believing the gospel means we put no confidence in the flesh.

[27 : 57] You see that phrase threaded through our passage, no confidence in the flesh. The flesh in the New Testament refers to a number of different things, but throughout this passage, confidence in the flesh refers to any worldly achievement that might give us false confidence and rest.

Any worldly achievement that might give us false rest. The idea is if positively we boast in Jesus, the flip side of the coin is we choose not to boast or rest in anything of the flesh.

No accolades, no achievements, no successes are worthy of our rest. The idea is boasting and resting go together. I think we see this in the parable of the rich fool.

You remember he was prosperous. He did well. He built bigger barns, not because he needed bigger barns for his necessity.

He built bigger barns to flag them out and brag them, as it were, to all his neighbors. Then he says to his soul, soul, take rest.

[29 : 07] Relax, eat, drink, and be merry. But the Lord says, fool, this night your soul is required of you. So what Paul is saying is be careful what you boast in, but also be careful what causes you to rest.

So he goes to this list, you know, Apostle Paul has more reason to rest in what he's done than anything, anyone else. You know, he goes to this list, say, that he has reason to rest in the flesh because of his birth.

Circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews. The idea is he comes from a great family, which is a big deal in Judaism.

He has a great pedigree. That's what we would say of an athlete who comes from, or is a daughter or son of another athlete. We'd say they have a great pedigree. They have great natural resources in the bloodstream.

He had all the right influences and all the right exposure to set him apart. He had reason to rest in the flesh because of his zeal. He continues, as to the law, a Pharisee.

[30 : 12] That just means someone who's rigorously keeping the law, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

You know, he's not only in the right family, he gets after it. He's not only set up well, he makes a name for himself and carefully and zealously obedient to the law.

And yet he turns from all those things and leaves them all behind. And while we may not have the same reasons as the Apostle Paul to rest in the flesh, we're nevertheless vulnerable to those same errors.

While we know we must not do anything to be acceptable to God, and we know we must not boast anything but the gospel, we nevertheless look too much and too often to how we measure up to others in the flesh.

And that's where we can find our rest. Even though we've been declared completely acceptable in God, even though the only person that matters in the universe loves us unconditionally, we are not content.

[31 : 18] Our hearts are not quiet. We're anxious. We're not satisfied. We ride high when others think well of us and things are going well, but we plummet in despair when others don't think so well.

We want our lives to count. We want to make a difference. We want to make a name for ourselves. We want to leave a legacy. And that's not all bad, but we want it too much.

We want anything other than an ordinary, missable life. Our culture just pours gas on this desire.

It says, chase your dreams. Be great. Be you. Follow your heart. And gives very little attention to how fulfilling an ordinary, selfless life can be. One satirical news article I read recently captures our culture's philosophy so well.

The title of the article is Unambitious Loser with Happy, Fulfilling Life Still Lives in Hometown. He writes, Unambitious Loser with Happy, Fulfilling Life in Hometown.

[32 : 57] Who's perfectly comfortable being a nobody for the rest of his life. You're supposed to laugh a little bit on this. I think it's a great article. You know, one of his childhood friends says, As soon as Mike graduated from college, he moved back home.

Started working at the local insurance firm. Now he's nearly 30 years old. Living in the exact same town he was born in. Working at the same job. And is extremely contented in all aspects of his home and professional life.

It's really sad. He says, Sources stated that the pathetic loafer has never had any interest in moving to a nearby bigger city.

Despite the fact that he has nothing better than to sit around all day. Being an involved member in the community. And using his ample free time to follow pursuits that give him genuine pleasure.

Former classmates also confirmed that the underachiever is already resigned to going to his little, small-time, stable, extremely fulfilling life in town each day.

[33 : 58] And has zero ambitions to leave his position and pursue a more prestigious and soul-crushing career path in the city. His cousin concludes, I'm just glad I'm out of there and didn't end up like Mike.

The last thing I'd ever want is to have a loving family nearby and feel a sense of pleasure when reflecting on my life. Obviously, humorously, it gets it.

Our culture says a great life is not made in being faithful to small things. Our culture says a great life is one that hits the billboards.

One that lights up the sky. The culture says, Go, be great, chase your dream. But you don't have to be great. That's what this text would say to us. You don't have to be successful.

You don't have to make a name for yourself. You don't have a life on social media that can be measured, managed, and maintained for all to see. You can live a restful, simple, deeply fulfilling life right here.

[35 : 07] I remember reading a devastating article a couple years ago about an Australian model. who was a well-known, highly paid Instagram model. So she took all these pictures.

I didn't see her pictures, by the way. But took all these pictures of herself. And somewhere along the lines was convicted or woke up to all that went behind these pictures.

And so she went back in and adjusted the blurbs on all these pictures. So instead of kind of look at how beautiful I am in this dress, she'd say, I didn't eat for two days.

I took 1,500 pictures to get the angle just right so that you wouldn't see any degree of fat. You know, or she went into this other picture and would describe it similarly.

I don't remember all the quotes, but the idea was never less searing because that image that's put forward before us that we're called to chase after and throw our lives after is just a mirage.

[36 : 11] It's fleeting. If you attain it or attain some status of it, it slips through your fingers. So what Paul's saying is don't rest there. Don't throw your life there.

Don't live confidence in the flesh. Keep rejoicing in the same things. That's what will save your soul.

As Spurgeon's grandfather said, tell him that again. We need to hear the same things because they're the things that will save our soul. But they're also the things that will deliver true joy to us in Christ.

Let me pray for us. Father in heaven, we thank you for these few minutes. Thank you for the opportunity to consider your word, to consider what you've done for us in Christ.

God, I pray that you would help us, that you would work in us a fresh sense of these same things that are true of us.

[37 : 23] I pray that you'd set any of us free that might be living in that performance treadmill, free to serve you, confident that you accept us completely.

I pray for anybody that might boast in other things, that you'd set them free, that you'd set us free to enjoy you and to rest in you alone.

We thank you and we worship you. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.

For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com.