

“That I May Know Him”

Philippians 3:7-16

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Philippians 3:7-16 says [7] *But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. [8] 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 [9] and 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— [10] that I may know him and the power of His resurrection, and may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, [11] that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*

[12] Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own. [13] 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, [14] I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. [15] Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. [16] Only let us hold true to what we have attained. This is God’s Holy and inspired Word and by His grace and mercy may it now be preached for you.

This may come as a surprise to you but I know George W. Bush. You’re probably thinking ‘yes we all know who George W. Bush is for he was an incredible leader in a pivotal moment in our nation’s history’ but I assure you I know him. The proof would be that if he were here right now in worship with us, he would be one of the first visitors to come out in the lobby after the service and say ‘Jim, how have you been doing? It’s so good to get to see you again and I hope we can catch up soon over a cup of coffee’ or something like that. Before I get too deep in this, I need to let you know that the George W. Bush I know has a wife named Sue, not Laura. This George wasn’t the 43rd president of our nation, but instead he was my neighbor and one of our fellow worshippers in our PCA church when we lived in Colorado. We used to love catching up with each other by taking a walk around the neighborhood, finding out how our kids were doing or work and what God was doing in each other’s lives. The beauty of it was that we developed a relationship that goes back at least 15 years and continued to deepen every time we met.

So why do I start our time in God’s Word this way, talking about a relationship with a friend? It is simply this; as we go into this new year there are many who say they know Jesus Christ yet it’s questionable when you look at the way they live that it’s questionable whether they have ever entered into a relationship with Him at all. When we come to know Jesus Christ personally, when we enter into a relationship with Him individually, everything in our life begins to change. This is exactly what Paul wants to show us as we spend time in this passage from Philippians 3.

Here again are his opening words in Philippians 3:7-8, [7] *But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. [8] 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...*

Paul begins by helping us understand that knowing Jesus personally is what reorders our values and priorities. He is masterfully using one of the contrast repetition tools in his tool bag as he is communicating to us that now that he knows Jesus Christ the things that he used to know means nothing at all for instead he values the eternal worth of knowing Christ. Everything he used to see as right standing before God he now sees as utterly useless, as a loss. I'd like to give some context here to what Paul is going to be telling us through this passage so I'd like to back up here.

What church is Paul addressing as he writes this letter to Philippi? You can see how this church is birthed in Acts 16 and here Paul is on a missionary journey as he is traveling with Silas, Luke and even Timothy has joined him. On this journey they are going back to some of the churches that God used Paul to found even as he and Barnabas went on their first missionary journey. Paul's goal is that he wants to see how the churches are doing and he wants to strengthen the churches by being with them once again. While he is in route, he has a desire to go into Bithynia but the Holy Spirit hinders him from going there and instead through a vision given to him at night Paul receives a vision of a man in Macedonia saying 'come over here and help us.' Immediately they set out the next day, as soon as they could, for Macedonia confident that God had called them to preach in an effective ministry in new territory. One of the things Paul loved to do was to take the Gospel where it had never gone before so this was fitting for his desire as a missionary.

Yet when they arrived in Philippi, the key city of Macedonia, to Paul's surprise there is no synagogue. For there to be a synagogue there had to be at least ten Jewish men or ten Jewish proselyte men in the area to establish a synagogue so that tells us something about the make up of the dynamic of this community and the insurance of what is about to be born. There are no men even though in his vision he saw a man but instead there are women. There are women who have gathered at the river which is an ordinary place for them to meet to pray and Paul goes to meet there with them. One of the women there is Lydia, the seller of purple, a woman of means and God had brought her as He was working in her heart. As Paul preached the Word of God, she received the Word of God and believed in Jesus Christ as her Savior. Here we have the first convert for this Philippian church.

Beyond this woman with means comes a woman without means, a young girl who is a slave. She is possessed by an evil spirit, a spirit of divination we are told. After she has been following Paul and Silas saying 'these are the servants of the God most High' continually, finally Paul turns to her and casts the demon out of her. It sounds like a good thing but the masters who are making money from her telling things of the future, have no income so they have Paul and Silas arrested, beaten and thrown into the dungeon. But it's here where God is still at work.

Even as they are in the dungeon, at midnight as they are worshipping, praising and singing praise to God an earthquake comes that opens their shackles and the doors of the prison but it opens the heart of the keeper of the jail himself – the Philippian jailer. This is the beginning of the Philippian church. Maybe it's not the most auspicious start to the ministry Paul might have anticipated but it was the way that God chose to work.

From this church which became the first church in Europe as Paul was planting churches, Paul developed a relationship of deep love for this church. It was a church that he was very confident in. He praised them for their faithfulness to God for their willing participation with him in ministry, but this was also a church that faced some challenges of its own. We learned at the beginning of Philippians 3 that the Judaizers, the group that had been hounding the Gospel wherever Paul had gone was now here as well. The Judaizers would say 'if you want to believe

in Jesus Christ that's okay but,...' then they would add to the belief in Jesus Christ what they believed was certainly important. They most typically believed that if you really wanted to be a Christian you have to keep the Jewish rites, especially the rite of circumcision.

Paul is completely fed up with the Judaizers and he gives this three fold warning in Philippians 3:2-3 which says *[2] Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. [3] For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—* Then Paul is about to put out a personal challenge to anyone who might be believing that the Judaizers are right. He basically tells them if they believe that their works righteousness that stems only from pride can reach them to God then he gives them this personal challenge in the next few verses.

Philippians 3:4-6 says *[4] 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: [5] circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; [6] as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.* He basically tells them if they want to get in a works based theological discussion with him then he will leave them in the dust every time. He had outperformed the very best of them and Paul was on the rise. Paul was one of the rising Pharisaical leaders and he knew by wasting so much of his life on trying to get to God through works of his own self effort and pride, he knew the price tag that comes with such an effort.

But then Paul met Jesus on the road to Damascus. In route to persecuting the church with even greater zeal, Jesus intercepted this religious radical extremist and set him on a different path. Now we're in a better position to understand what Paul is saying in Philippians 3:7-16. Everything that Paul had value in and rested in as a means of making himself right with God, he now saw as a detriment. The very things he thought were deposited in his account toward earning God's acceptance have proved to be exponential withdrawals instead. Not only did Paul not have righteousness of his own but in God's sight he was a bankrupt beggar without hope of ever recovering from his enormous debt.

When Paul saw Jesus for who He was – the Son of God, the Messiah who had come to claim Paul as His own – Paul knew his debt was canceled but even more than that he knew that no longer did he have this insurmountable debt but now he possessed the righteousness of Christ. Immediately Paul's values and priorities began to change. Nothing he had ever done before mattered compared to what Jesus Christ had done for him. That's why Paul counted (past tense) those things he had done as useless and destructive with regard to him being in right relationship to God and that's why continues to count (present tense) everything he could possibly do now or in the future as the same. Nothing can compare to the surpassing value of knowing Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Here is where I think we see the eternal difference between knowing about Jesus Christ and knowing Jesus Christ personally as Lord. As a Pharisee Paul excelled in knowing the law and knowing about the Messiah but he didn't know Him personally. God would not allow Paul to stay forever at holding himself at arm's length from right relationship with God through theology. Theology itself can become an idol that we use, an idol at which we try to keep God at bay. Paul had been an expert in it for years and years. He had known the Scriptures only to try to keep God in a box, the box of his own preconceived understanding. God wouldn't let that idol stand nor would He let the idol of self-righteousness stand. God striped it of him when Jesus encountered him and showed him who He was. Then knowing Jesus as his Lord, rather than knowing about Jesus who is Lord, made all the difference in the world in Paul's life.

Paul tells us in this passage from Philippians 3 that readily he suffers the loss of knowing Christ Jesus. What did he lose? Perhaps many of us can look back in our life and when Jesus drew us to Himself we understood we needed Him as our Savior. We couldn't do it on our own. Many of us when we accepted Christ had friendships that started to drift away. It wasn't because we weren't still reaching out to our friends but because of our friends who at that point God was not drawing to Himself started to distance themselves from us. So Paul suffered the loss of relationships he once enjoyed before he knew Christ.

Paul also suffered the loss, where he disregarded prestige or career aspirations he might have had as the rising star among the Pharisees. He discounted the fame and the fortune that might have been his if he continued to climb their social ladder. He devalued all that he once held dear and counted every form of self-reliance and self-promotion as rubbish in order that he might gain Christ.

The original word used for rubbish that Paul uses in Philippians 3:8 is a much more disgusting word in the Greek. It is human refuse. Paul says that everything he thought that was putting him in right standing with God, all those things he had poured himself into year after year, have all been cast off as a by-product of works because now he knows Christ.

Paul says in Philippians 3:8b-9, *[8b] For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ [9] and 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—* More than anything else Paul wanted his life to prove that he belonged to Christ, not because of anything Paul had achieved but because of everything that Paul had received by faith.

One author I read recently put it this way; Paul wanted the Divine scrutiny that he would undergo either at Christ's return or upon his own earthly demise to reveal unquestionably that he had been in a vital, continuous relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul wanted his life to proclaim that Christ's life was his life and His righteousness was his. So much so that Paul goes on to declare this goal in Philippians 3:10-11 which says *[10] that I may know him and the power of His resurrection, and may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, [11] that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*

Paul is using repetition here to drive his point home. He reiterates what he has already told us in verse 8 just to make sure we understand the fact that knowing Jesus Christ experientially through a vibrant personal relationship with Him surpasses knowing about Jesus Christ in every way. Paul then expounds what's in knowing Jesus in this manner. What does it look like to know Jesus Christ in a relational way? He begins to unfold this by saying as we know Him relationally and personally, we will experience the power of the resurrection.

What is the resurrection? It is when Jesus Christ rose from the dead but what does that mean to us? When Christ was crucified, dead and buried, if He had remained lying in the grave rather than being raised in three days, we still would have no hope. But the sheer fact of the resurrection is the fact that it gives us hope. The resurrection is what declares that Christ conquered death which is the wages of sin and He has made us right with God. He alone is the right Sacrifice, the Perfect Sacrifice that leaves us in right standing with God through faith in Him. So, when we look at the resurrection and its power, we are looking at having victory over sin because Christ has already won the victory.

Do we understand the beauty and enormity of that statement? No, we will never reach perfection this side of eternity and that's one of the problems still facing the Philippian church. Some had arrived there and because of their Jewish upbringing and the proselyte teaching of the

Judaizers they had bought into their teaching that they could become so godly that would actually have arrived and not have to do anything more. Paul is not saying that and neither am I. We can't reach sinless perfection in this life however, we can experience victory over sin. Because Jesus rose from the grave, sin's dominion has no reign over us. So, when we face temptation, whether it comes from within or without, we don't have to give in. That is the power, enormity and beauty of the resurrection which gives us victory over sin and hope in this life. It gives us hope not only for the future when we stand with God for all eternity, but hope in the present tense – we have hope with God because Jesus rose from the grave.

Paul continues though by saying when we continue this relationship with Jesus Christ the way we are to experience it, not only do we have the resurrection power, but we also will share in Christ's suffering. The ESV translation puts it this way; to should, come along side of a portion of Christ's suffering here on earth but I believe the Greek word for *sharing* in Christ's suffering gives us more meaning than that and it's *koinónia*. This word is most translated as fellowship so I prefer the New American Standard and others that translate Philippians 3:10 this way; *[10] that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.*

My mind automatically goes to J.R.R. Tolkien and his book The Fellowship of the Ring from the Lord of the Rings trilogy, when I hear 'the fellowship of His sufferings.' I like watching the relationship of Frodo Baggins and Samwise Gamgee as it develops. Frodo has been chosen to be the ring bearer – this heavy weight as it increases in the weight of carrying it. As it gets heavier it takes a toll on him, even as he carries it to Mount Doom in its final destruction to rid the ring, yet here is Sam is faithful friend and compatriot beside him each step of the way, doing his best to encourage and help come along side Frodo to the point that Sam turns to Frodo and says, 'Mr. Frodo, I cannot carry the ring for you, but I can carry you.'

Perhaps now we have come a little closer to understanding what the fellowship of Christ's suffering actually means as Paul speaks of it here in Philippians 3. While we could never bear or carry the cross that only Jesus Christ could and He must carry, we can come along side and share some of His sufferings with Him. Like Him, our suffering is both internal and external. Taking up the cross of self-denial with complete abandonment to the will of God in place of our own, at times feels like something more than we can bear but we are called to do exactly what Christ did – facing isolation, loneliness, ridicule while standing for righteousness in the face of sin, enduring temptation, interceding on behalf of others while speaking redemptively into their lives even as they continue to not listen to what we say, bearing with one another and carrying one another's burdens even as we do our best to shoulder our own as God helps us. All of these are just some of the ways we can share in the inevitable reality of suffering with Jesus as we live for Him.

Christian suffering is coming to us all and this is seen clearly in I Peter. It is something we should welcome because as we go through Christian suffering one author put it this way; 'suffering as Christians and those who are suffering Christians stand in close proximity to the suffering of Christ.' It is our privilege to endure suffering and hardship whenever we suffer with Christ for righteousness' sake, remaining firm in our faith. Paul adds one last thought in this Philippians 3 passage of knowing Christ in this relational, personal way before he goes on.

Paul says knowing Christ in a personal way is an unending personal pursuit which doesn't end until we become like Him in His death. Paul is not expressing some form of a death wish meaning he can't wait until he dies but he is simply saying that when we become so much like Christ, we become like Him in His self-denial to the point of totally denying Himself. When

Christ's humiliation began, when He left the throne room of heaven, when He laid aside some of the glory that was His own as He was one with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, and became a man. This became a reality for Jesus Christ as He died to Himself.

Over and over again as Jesus taught and led the disciples who were following Him, He would redeem those who were constantly not getting what He was trying to say. Over and over He would die to Himself all the way to the Garden of Gethsemane where when He was facing the cross, pours His heart out to His Father in Matthew 26:39 which says *[39] And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will."* This is what Paul is driving us to when he says Philippians 3:10, until we *becoming like Him in His death.*

Christian suffering is what conforms us, presses us into the mold of being so like Christ that we can die to ourselves and lay down our own agendas. I'm not into social media but if I were I would have to watch myself so closely, because it's so easy when you are on social media and think you have a measure of distance from others that it is so easy to promote ourselves and our own agenda. It's so easy to speak rashly with each other, in a critical and destructive way rather than building one another up as brothers and sisters in Christ. We can actually forget that we are brothers and sisters in Christ and we're in this together for all eternity and that we're here to model the relationship of Jesus Christ which changes how we relate with each other. Paul wants to know Him on that level, but I die to myself. He knows it's no longer about him in any way shape or form but it's about Jesus Christ, His plan, His agenda and the way He is working in our hearts and lives.

By knowing Christ in such a personal way it reorders the priorities and values of our lives and Paul is ready to move on in Philippians 3:12-16 to show us that knowing Jesus personally reorients our purpose in life. Philippians 3:12-14 says *[12] Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own. [13] 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, [14] I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

It is clear here that Paul is speaking about knowing Christ intimately in this life with all the implications we have already looked at in verses 7 through 11, but he makes it clear here that he doesn't see himself as already arrived or as someone who should throw up his hands in defeat. While Paul is already positionally or in principle right with God, perfect in Christ, he knows that practically with regard to his own sanctification he is a long way from reaching the goal of becoming like Christ so deliberately he pursues one purpose and that is to press on as one who wants to overtake and lay hold onto something that is of great value to him so that he might become like Christ.

I think Charles Spurgeon hit the nail on the head when he said; 'the less a man thinks of himself the more the man will think of Christ and the more the man thinks of Christ the more he will aim at becoming like Him.' I think this was Paul's heartbeat and he wants that for us. By these words, we see there was another issue facing this church. There were some who said 'plus Christ is the only way, you can believe in Him but you have to add Judaism and the Jewish rites and get circumcised' yet there were others still who said 'already been there, done that, I've arrived.'

Paul repeats himself in Philippians 3:13 because he wants earnestly for the church to understand that if you think you can make it on your own, Paul tells them he knows he can't make it on his own and he has quite a track record, not only as a Pharisee but even as the Apostle

out of due season (I Corinthians 15:8) that God had used so dramatically. No one else in the crowd could say they were stoned to death, raised back to life and walked right back into the same city but Paul could. Yet he is saying that doesn't matter for he doesn't consider that he has attained the resurrection power that he wants. He doesn't consider he has made it to the level of Christianity, pursuing Christ to the level he wants to have it and he actually says he is far from that, but he forgets what lies behind and strains to what lies ahead, toward the prize of the upper call of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul refers back to an analogy he loves to use which is the one of a runner running the race but here he inserts himself as the champion runner. As he is in the race he is not going to look back, forgetting what is behind. If you have been in a race and you look back the tendency will be that you will stumble and fall for looking back is always destructive to winning the race. Paul is telling us that there is no way we can look back as to why we are moving forward in the name of Christ. Forgetting is not simply a mere memory lapse. Forgetting is something deliberate. Paul says he simply obliterates – blocks out everything that is behind him so Paul is not thinking about the legs of the race that has already been run. Everything that he has ever done that was a successful thing in the name of Christ, he is not looking back at and he is not most certainly looking back at his past failures. Remember he was the zealot who stood by as Stephen was stoned to death with his vote adding to that deed. Paul does not look back and run the race. He strains forward to what lies ahead.

I love this analogy of the race. If you have seen a race where 3 or 4 of them are neck and neck coming down to the wire of the finish line and only one of them is going to win, it's usually the one who stretches out as far as he can as he is running with all of his might all the way to the end and usually think he is going to end flat on his face the way he stretches and strains to win. This is the kind of commitment and effort that Paul says is required when we know Christ. If we know Christ in the power of His resurrection, in His sufferings and become like Him unto the His death and we want to gain the prize of the upper call in Christ Jesus, it takes everything we have and we can't look back, if we do, we'll lose course and strength.

As we begin another year, it's important for us to remember that God who has so faithfully blessed and used us, will bless us and faithfully use us again provided we press on rather than looking back. There is more race to run. There has been a race put out before us and we need to look to Jesus, the Author and finisher of our faith, to Him alone, so we can run the race faithfully and accomplish yet what God has before us. The goal, which is the human aspect, is to finish well but the prize which is the God aspect, is the well done good and faithful servant, where we go up into the Judge's booth to receive this accolade that is to be given. That is what we are to pursue.

One last thought here is the way Paul helps us tie this all together. Philippians 3:15-16 says *[15] Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. [16] Only let us hold true to what we have attained.* Paul understands that we are works in progress because that is what he was. It's easy to look at someone like Paul and look at our life and think Paul always walked five feet above ground but Paul was always learning, always striving. Romans 7 makes this so clear where Paul was struggling with his own sins and yet he kept pressing on.

By the way, those who are mature usually don't think they are mature. It's the same way as those who are holy don't usually see themselves as holy. That's why I love hanging out with elder saints who love the Lord, serve the Lord and are pursuing the Lord because I love to hear how they talk about Jesus all the time. These people have so much of life figured out yet they

see themselves quite differently for they see themselves as more work needs to be done on them by the grace of God and still needing to be conformed in the image and likeness of God. They are increasingly humbled as they see the beauty of the work of God in spite of our sin, in the face of our sin and constantly they are becoming more and more like Him until that moment they step to the other side. That's how I want to finish well.

That would be my prayer for us as a church, that we would finish well and not as those who somehow think we have arrived and now we can coast or not as someone who has arrived and now someone else can step up and do the work. Do we realize the beauty of the spiritual gifting that God has given us where we can serve Him some way in some fashion effectively in a way no one else should or could right now no matter what age we are? He is calling you as He is calling me to serve Him, pour everything out, hold nothing back, sticking the chest out across the finish line until you break the tape.

That brings me to the takeaway from this passage. The takeaway is knowing Jesus Christ starts at the moment of salvation but for every believer this is only the beginning. Knowing Jesus Christ remains a lifelong endeavor as we strive to know more of Him in order to become more like Him until we are with Him in glory. While you let that sink in, let's take a little bit of time to do some self-assessment. Whatever it is that we may value or whatever we put our trust in as a means to be right with God or more likely a means of thinking we're in tighter with God thinking we'll receive more of His blessing because of it, whatever it is, if it is anything other than a life changing personal relationship with God with Jesus Christ, it is rubbish. Make a list and pile it up as much as Paul did and list all the things you value that give you a sense of self-acceptance which include your heritage, career, family, the things you own and done even in the name of Christ – if all this is more than your relationship to Christ than it is destructive.

Falsely trusting in our own abilities, our own performance will prove to us not only to fail but will be our downfall. Jesus Christ is calling us to serve Him now. He wants us to keep pressing on. Do you realize how much more work there is to be done before Jesus Christ returns? Do you realize the beauty of participating in that ministry that Christ has called us together as congregation to do, that we might love Christ so personally that it changes everything? As we love and serve Him most personally and that this relationship with Him is the most precious to us than any relationship we have on this earth, there is no telling what God might do. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, do help us because we want to press on for the prize of that upper call of God in Christ Jesus when we stand and You complete. We want to press on and do the things that You have ordained for us to do, even when You called us unto Yourself. Let us be undistracted Lord, by anything that would keep us from knowing You intimately, personally, relationally in a life changing way. Lord, as we dare to step out in faith and follow You, encourage us, strengthen us and give us what we need that we might serve You well. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear for the ministry opportunities that are before us today, tomorrow and the next day and throughout this entire upcoming year. Mature us as we walk in Christ for it's in His Name we ask this, Amen.