



IMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH
SERIES: TOGETHER FOR THE GOSPEL
SCRIPTURE: PHILIPPIANS 3:1-11
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INTRODUCTION

One of the easiest things for people to do is place confidence in themselves. We naturally trust our accomplishments, our background, our morality, or our efforts to make us acceptable before God. Some trust their family heritage. Others trust religious activity or outward obedience. But throughout Philippians, Paul has repeatedly reminded the church that true joy is not found in ourselves, but in Christ.

In this lesson, Paul warns the Philippians about people who were teaching that righteousness comes through outward works rather than faith in Jesus. Paul speaks strongly because the danger is serious. A person can appear religious on the outside while still missing the righteousness that comes only through faith.

Text

Philippians 3:1-11

Finally, my brothers,^[a] rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.

²Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. ³For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God^[b] and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— ⁴though 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: ⁵circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law,^[c] blameless. ⁷But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸Indeed, 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 ⁹and 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— ¹⁰that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Explanation

Rejoice in the Lord (vs. 1-3)

Up to this point, Paul has repeatedly mentioned joy to the Philippians. Now, with urgency, he tells them, “Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.” Rejoicing in the Lord was so important to Paul that he did not mind repeating himself. In fact, he believed these reminders would protect them.

Paul’s concern here is not mainly physical persecution, but spiritual deception. Earlier, Paul encouraged them not to fear their opponents and reminded them that it has been “granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake (Php. 1:28-29). Here, he warns them to “watch out” for false teachers. At first, his language may sound like a warning about physical danger, but Paul is actually concerned about people who could lead the church away from the truth.

Some background is helpful. During his upbringing, Paul and the other Jews were taught that righteousness came through keeping the law. In the Old Testament, God gave Israel many commands. Some involved sacrifices, others involved justice and love for neighbor. But many people especially focused on outward signs, particularly circumcision.

The story of circumcision begins with Abraham. In Genesis 12, God called Abraham to leave his homeland and promised to make him into a great nation, bless those who blessed him, and bless all nations through his descendants. At the time, Abraham was seventy-five years old and childless (Gen. 12:1-11).

Later, in Genesis 15, God again promised Abraham a son. Though Abraham was old, he believed God's promise. Scripture says, "Abraham believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness" (Gen. 15:6)

Years later, in Genesis 17, God gave circumcision as the sign of His covenant with Abraham and his descendants. Circumcision did not make Abraham righteous. Abraham had already been counted righteous by faith before he was circumcised. As Romans 4:11 helpfully explains, "He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised."

Throughout the Old Testament, God made it clear that outward signs without inward faithfulness were meaningless. Jeremiah 9:25 says that many were "circumcised merely in the flesh" while remaining uncircumcised in heart.

Bringing this back to Philippians, Paul warns the church against those who believed righteousness came through outward acts rather than faith in Christ. That is why he strongly calls them "dogs," "evildoers," and "those who mutilate the flesh." Paul reminds the Philippians that true righteousness comes through faith, not human effort. He says, "We are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh."

Rather than trust in human effort, Paul urges believers to "rejoice in the Lord" and "glory in Christ Jesus." Our confidence is not in our works, heritage, or outward performance, but in what Jesus has done for us. Rejoice in Him alone.

Counting Them as Rubbish that I Might Gain Christ (vs. 4-9)

Here Paul does two things. First, he exposes the emptiness of the false teachers' confidence. Second, he shares the joy he has found in trusting Christ instead of himself.

If anyone had reason to boast in the flesh, it was Paul. Before following Jesus, Paul believed righteousness came through works of the law. By human standards, he had an impressive spiritual résumé. He had the right heritage, the right training, and the right accomplishments. If righteousness could be earned, Paul would have been near the top of the list.

But everything changed when he came to know Christ. Paul now considers all his former gains to be loss compared to the value of knowing Jesus. What he once trusted in, he now sees as useless for attaining righteousness.

Paul contrasts two realities. On one hand, he has deep joy in knowing Christ. On the other, he feels disgust toward his former attempts to earn righteousness through human effort. Heritage, outward markers, and religious accomplishments cannot make a person righteous before God. In fact, trusting in those things can keep a person from depending fully on Christ.

That is why Paul says, "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." He even calls his former accomplishments "rubbish," a word that can mean filth or dung. Paul uses strong language to show how worthless human achievement is compared to the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ.

True righteousness comes from God through faith. Paul explains that he wants to be found in Christ, "not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ."

The Power of His Resurrection (vs. 10-11)

Paul closes this section by looking ahead to the future. In the present, he rejoices in the Lord and counts everything as loss compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus. Jesus is so valuable to Paul that he is willing to lose his status, accomplishments, and even suffer if it means gaining Christ through faith.

But Paul knows this life is not the end. He believes there is a future resurrection awaiting those who belong to Christ. No matter what suffering he experiences now, Paul knows it will not compare to the joy of being with Christ forever. Just as Jesus rose from the dead, Paul is confident that he too will be raised and live with Christ.

One clarification is helpful. Paul says, “that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.” At first, this may sound like Paul is uncertain about salvation or trying to earn it through effort. But that would contradict everything he has already said about righteousness coming through faith. More likely, Paul is speaking about the manner of his death, not the certainty of his salvation. Throughout Philippians, Paul has mentioned suffering, imprisonment, and the possibility of death. He does not know whether he will live or die, or whether he will see the Philippians again.

What is remarkable is that Paul is willing to suffer and even die if necessary because he knows death is not the end. He sees his suffering as sharing in the sufferings of Christ. And just as Christ died and rose again, Paul is confident that he too will be resurrected and live with Christ forever.

Discussion Questions

- What do you think it means to rejoice in the Lord?
- Paul said it was not trouble to write the same things to them. How many times do you need to be told something before you really understand?
- What stands out to you about Paul’s use of name-calling? He calls those who put confidence in the flesh as dogs, evildoers and those who mutilate the flesh.
- How do you think a person gets to heaven?
- Paul described his upbringing as a Jew. What is your upbringing as it relates to Christianity?
- Paul describes the *surpassing worth* of knowing Jesus. What words come to your mind to describe knowing Jesus?
- Paul said that he wanted to “*know him* in the power of the resurrection” and he also said that he “*may share in his suffering, becoming like him* in his death.” Do you think you can know God and not become like him?
- Do you think you can gain Christ and also gain this world?

Conclusions or Applications

FAITH IN JESUS ALONE

Perhaps more than any other passage in Philippians, Paul explains the gospel most clearly in our text today. A person is saved by trusting in Jesus alone for salvation.

There are at least three common misconceptions about salvation. One misconception is believing that a person is saved because they were raised in a Christian home. The thinking may be that since one's parents were Christians, the child automatically becomes a Christian as well. Yet Paul knew that his own heritage and upbringing could not save him. In the same way, growing up in a Christian family cannot save a person. Each individual must personally choose to trust in Jesus.

Another common misconception is that salvation can be earned through good works. Yet Paul makes clear that his own works could not save him. In fact, as Paul describes his past accomplishments, we realize that few, if any, of us could match his credentials. Paul had far more religious achievements than most people ever will. Yet he willingly forsook those accomplishments because he understood they were insufficient to save him. He rightly counted them as rubbish compared to Christ.

A third misconception is that salvation comes through a combination of faith in Jesus and good works. Yet Paul again makes clear that salvation requires counting all other grounds of confidence as worthless. A person must trust in Jesus alone. When we add something else as the basis of our righteousness, we are no longer fully trusting in Christ.

A commonly known acrostic for the word F.A.I.T.H. can be helpful to remember. **F**orsaking **A**ll **I** Trust **H**im.