

Knowing Jesus - Philippians 3:1-11

February 26, 2017

Introduction:

- You may not have set back and thought too much about the challenges of planting a church near a city like Boston, but one of the challenges is the transient nature of our city. People are always coming and going and most of the reasons can be boiled down to school and work. You come because you're starting school or a new job and you leave because you've finished school and/or are taking a new job elsewhere. Given this situation, my guess is that you guys are pretty good filling out school applications, scholarship applications and job resumes. Who in the past two years has filled out either a school application or put together a resume? What advice do they give you when filling them out? Probably at the top of the list is something like this: Present yourself in a way that makes you look a little bit better than the other applicants. Be yourself, but put your best self forward. Can anyone relate to this? We all realize the importance of making a good impression and putting ourselves ahead of the competition.
- Through work and school, we all constantly live in a world where we're having to prove ourselves on a daily basis. The problem with this is that it often overflows into how we relate to God, seeking to make a good impression with our achievements so that we can earn his approval. When we do this with God, the results are tragic.

When we turn to our passage today, Paul tells us that there is a much better way. It's this:

The Point: Scrap your self-reliant credentials and treasure knowing Christ.

Read Philippians 3:1-11

- As you can see, Paul's intensity is fueled by the fact that he used to be headed down a tragic path of self-reliant spirituality but has found freedom from that false way of life to a life of treasuring knowing Christ and making much of him.

I. Scrap your Self-Reliant Credentials (1-6)

3:1 is a transition verse, a seam connecting this passage to what Paul has previously written.

- Paul begins by calling the "brothers and sisters" again to "rejoice in the Lord" (see 2:17-18; 29; 4:4). The modifier that we should rejoice "in the Lord" is a reminder that our joy is not contingent upon our circumstances. No matter what we are facing, Jesus is enough.
- Then Paul alerts us that what he's about to share is nothing new. He had shared these things with them before and doesn't hesitate to share with them again. Why? It was a "safeguard" for them. It is safe for us to constantly remind each other of the gospel. Sing the gospel, read the gospel, proclaim the gospel...the GOSPEL!!!

1. Watch out for those who add requirements to the gospel (2).

- Here Paul says "Look out" three times (present-active-imperative) and gives three

descriptors of these people who were teaching a false gospel. They were the Judaizers.

- Judaizers were Jews who had accepted Jesus but insisted that all Christians had to obey all of the OT ceremonial laws, especially circumcision. It was Jesus plus obedience to the law (Acts 15:1-19; Gal. 2:15-21; 3:6-4:31).
- Look out for the **dogs**
 - For those of you who love dogs: Paul lived in a different context. Paul's not thinking of your cuddly little pet, he's thinking of the dogs that were nasty, unclean and dangerous.
- Look out for the **evildoers**
 - They are evildoers because their teachings make their followers self-reliance, thus obscuring their need for Jesus.
- Look out for **those who mutilate the flesh**
 - Here Paul is referring to circumcision.
- Why is Paul so critical of these people?
 - When you add anything to the gospel you lost the gospel. Jesus plus anything is nothing. If they don't watch out for these people and this false doctrine, it will destroy their faith and it will hinder their mission as a church.

2. The true people of God are Spirit-empowered worshipers who boast in Christ, not their credentials (3).

- **The True Circumcision**: if, by faith, you have trusted in Christ alone for salvation, you have been circumcised. This is why Paul was telling them to reject the requirement to be circumcised. They were already circumcised in Jesus.

“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” (Romans 2:28-29 ESV; see also Gal. 5:1-6; 6:15; Col. 2:11-14).

What are the marks of true followers of Jesus?

- **We worship by the Spirit of God**
 - The empowering presence of the Holy Spirit is one of the distinguishing characteristics of a true follower of Jesus, not our obedience to the law (see Rom. 7:6; 8:1-14).
 - Our obedience is a gospel-motivated and spirit-empowered obedience.
- **We boast in Christ Jesus**
 - God has orchestrated salvation in such a way that we have nothing that we can boast about. If salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone to the glory of God alone,

then there's nothing that I can boast in (see Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 3:27; Gal. 6:14).

- **We put no confidence in the flesh**

- We all put confidence somewhere and as humans we are really good at trusting in others things except Jesus for salvation.

Transition: Paul now shifts from first person plural to first person singular and gives us a stunning self-portrait of his journey with Jesus. If there was anyone who could potentially brag about his credentials, Paul says it was him. He basically says, "If you want to brag, I can brag even more."

- Do any of you have a "one-upper" in your life? You know, someone who always has something to top whatever news you share. Well, I've been in a few conversations this weekend that went something like this, "How was your vacation week?" Do I share the good or the bad?
 - The good: great family time, swimming at the Y, playing games together (Ticket to Ride) and awesome weather.
 - Better: Disney world, swimming with Mickey Mouse, 80 degrees.
 - The bad: I felt like we lived at the doctor's office. One kid with strep one day, the flu the next day and something else with another kid the day after that.
 - Worse: everyone got the flu, quarantined for 72 hours, we almost died.
- What are they after? More often than not, most one-uppers don't think they are really better than you. They probably have fragile self-esteems and they're just trying to impress you and make themselves feel better about their own life. This is not what Paul is doing. He's simply warning us that he's been down that road and it doesn't lead to life.

3. Paul scrapped his impeccable credentials for Christ (4-6).

Paul highlights seven items from his credentials:

- Birth Privileges
 - **Circumcised on the Eighth Day**
 - He was circumcised according the command of the law (Gen. 17:12).
 - **Of the People of Israel**
 - He is genealogically pure. His blood wasn't tainted by Gentile blood.
 - **Of the Tribe of Benjamin**
 - Jerusalem, the holy city of David, was in Benjamin's territory.
 - **A Hebrew of Hebrews**
 - This highlights not only his mother language but his educational background and cultural position.
- Personal and Religious Achievements
 - **As to the law, a Pharisee**
 - He was a member of one of the most important and influential religious

political parties during the time of Jesus. The Pharisees were the morally superior group of Jews as they prided themselves in their strict obedience of the OT laws.

- **As to zeal, a persecutor of the church**
 - He was so zealous for the law and for defending the purity of Israel's religious practice that he persecuted the church (see Acts 8:3; 9:1; 22:4-6; 26:10-11).
- **As to righteousness under the law, blameless**
 - This doesn't mean that Paul thought he was sinless, because obedience the law included using the means of atonement for sin. But he was confident of his moral performance. He wouldn't have hesitated twice to stand on his religious credentials.
- Paul had every reason to be confident in the flesh but he counted it all as loss. What's on your spiritual credentials and resume?
 - It doesn't matter if you've been baptized in the church.
 - It doesn't matter what church you grew up in.
 - It doesn't matter what your family tradition was.
 - It doesn't matter how good you think you are.
- What matters is what you do with Jesus.

II. Treasure Knowing Christ (7-11)

Many note that these next few verses contain the “essence of Pauline theology.”

Make it your ongoing lifelong aim to:

1. Treasure Jesus above all things (7-8).

- Paul counts *everything* as loss, even calling them “rubbish.” Some translations even go as strong to use the word “dung” or “refuse.” Paul uses such strong language because his previous experience with Judaism worked to blind him of his need for the grace of God in Christ.
- Why did he count them as loss?
 - He had to lose them in order to gain Christ and Jesus is someone worth losing everything for. You will never regret losing everything for Jesus.
 - Another passage is echoing behind Paul's comments here:

“For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.” (Luke 9:24 ESV).

- Jesus had become for Paul a hidden treasure worth selling all of his possessions to buy. He was a treasure of “surpassing worth.”

2. Believe in and be found in the righteousness of Christ (9).

- The theological term for this is justification.
 - In contrast to pursuing your own righteousness (see 3:2-6), the gospel is about trusting in the righteousness that God provides in Jesus (cf. Rom. 3:21-24; 4:3-5; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 2:20-21; 3:21-22; Tit. 3:5; 1 Pet. 2:24).
 - Jesus was perfect in his obedience. He deserved life. We were sinful and deserve death. All of your debts from sin, all of the bills you owe God because of your disobedience are brought to Jesus and God gives him no discounts. He pays for every single one of them on the cross. This is the good news of the gospel.
 - The way you receive this benefit is through faith. We could define faith as “the act of counting as loss all those things that may be conceived as grounds for self-confidence before God” (Moises Silva).
- Ray Ortlund paints a clear picture of this when he says, “God’s final category for you is not your goodness *versus* your badness, but your union with Christ *versus* your distance from Christ” (Ortlund, 34). What’s your distance to Jesus?
- Why is this truth important for the Christian life? “I never have to do a moment’s labor to gain or maintain my justified status before God! Freed from the burden of such a task, I now can put my energies into enjoying God, pursuing holiness, and ministering God’s amazing grace to others” (Milton Vincent, 20).

3. Pursue, know and be transformed by Christ (10).

- The theological term for this is sanctification.
- Another way to translate this would be to say, “I make it my aim to know Jesus.” This connects back up with the “knowing” theme in 3:8. Check this out: Paul is saying this thirty years after he first encountered Jesus.
 - “So God is adequate in this further sense, that in knowing him fully we shall find ourselves fully satisfied, needing and desiring nothing more” (J. I. Packer).
- Paul describes two things that summarize his pursuit to know Christ:
 - Experience the suffering and death of Christ
 - Following the “Man of Sorrows” involves suffering as he suffered. This is how God refines us and shapes us.
 - How do you grow in humility? Get acquainted with the death of Christ.
 - How do you grow sacrificial love and service for others (spouse, kids, church, community)? Get acquainted with the death of Christ.
 - The greater I experience and know the death of Christ, the more I will consider myself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ (see Rom. 6:1-11).
 - Experience the resurrection power of Christ
 - The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is now at work in believers through the power of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:19-21).
- The more your life is about knowing Jesus, there more:
 - Boldness you have for God.

- Contentment you will have in God.
- “Once you become aware that the main business that you are here for is to know God, most of life’s problems fall into place of their own accord” (J. I. Packer).

4. Be with Christ (11).

- The theological term for this is glorification.
- Paul isn’t confessing doubt that he will one day raise from the dead physically like Jesus. See 3:20-21. What he isn’t sure about is the *timing* and *circumstances*.
- When we are glorified, all things will have been made new. The great reversal and redemption will be complete.

Conclusion: Dream with me. What would your life look like and what would our church be like if we all scrapped our self-reliant credentials and made treasuring knowing Christ our central aim in life?

“How wonderful it is to come every Sunday into a liberating church! All week long we swim in an ocean of judgment and negative scrutiny. We constantly have to comply with the demands of a touchy world, and we never measure up... Then, on Sunday, we walk into a new kind of community where we discover an environment of grace in Christ alone. It is so refreshing. Sinners like us can breathe again! It’s as if God simply changes everyone’s topic of conversation from what’s wrong with us, which is plenty, to what’s right with Christ, which is endless. He replaces our negativity, finger-pointing, and self-hatred with the good news of his grace for the undeserving. Who couldn’t come alive in a community that’s constantly inhaling that heavenly atmosphere?” (Ray Ortlund).

“When the doctrine is clear and the culture is beautiful, that church will be powerful” (Ray Ortlund).