



GOSPEL
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DEVOTIONALS 6

PHILIPPIANS 3:1-11

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.

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— 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. 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.

DAY 1

PHILIPPIANS 3:1-3

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You may have heard the joke about the preacher who began one of his points with the word "Finally." A boy in the congregation leaned over to his father and asked, "What does he mean by 'finally'?" The father replied, "Absolutely nothing, Son." Chuckles like that may be elicited when we read "Finally" in the English translation here because Paul goes on with several more points to make before he wraps up the letter. This word can also be translated "moreover" or "and so." Perhaps that would be a better way to go?

But what does Paul want to add to his previous exhortations? Interestingly enough, he is pursuing the joy of the Philippian believers by means of a warning. Note three things here: 1. His focus is that the Philippians rejoice in the Lord. 2. This is a matter of safety. 3. It is tied to theological accuracy. Let's explore this further starting with point #3.

Earlier Paul has answered the practical question of how to get along in the church with the high doctrine of Christology (cf. Phil 2:1-11). Here Paul addresses his own call for the Philippians to rejoice by pointing to the doctrine of justification. In Philippi, as in other places in the early church (see Galatians), folks were wanting to add requirements to the gospel message rather than allowing it to be the free gift that it is! Paul calls out the "mutilators of the flesh" as those who wanted to add the ethnic/religious marker of circumcision to one's experience of Christ in order to validate it. Paul is insistent. We are justified by Christ alone! Rejoice *in the Lord*--nothing else. As we noted above, Paul highlights this as a matter of safety for the church. Such an interesting word choice. If you want to be safe, be doctrinally sound.

So how does this warning cut through millennia and arrive in our inbox today? Very few of us are banking on circumcision for our joy or as added proof of our salvation. But we find all sorts of other additives--family values, church attendance, monetary gifts, exploits of service, length of prayer times, etc.--to use as evidence of our salvation. Paul says to find your joy in the fact that the Lord has justified you and made you righteous. We receive this gift by faith through no work of our own! Stay safe.

PRAYER

Father, may we constantly be people who are bringing truth to the struggle of our lives. May we find our joy in resting in your finished work.

--Andrew VanderMaas

DAY 2

PHILIPPIANS 3:4-5

...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.

When Jesus encountered Saul on the road to Damascus, Saul saw something so true he had to submit or be destroyed. The light that he had refused in Stephen's shining face (Acts 7:55-58) now met him with a question: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Saul did not hear condemnation, but recognized authority by answering, "Who are you, Lord?" Jesus identified himself straightforwardly and told Saul what he needed to do. The light that blinded him for three days exposed/revealed all things for what they were; the religion Saul had so zealously pursued hardened into a dead idol.

Saul was reborn. He had a new identity—servant of the Lord Jesus Christ; a new security—confidence in the truth of the gospel; and a new priority—preaching the gospel wherever he went and bringing believers to maturity in Christ. Saul, now called Paul, knew he was in a spiritual battle and recognized the crafty seduction of the enemy in the Judaizers' insistence that something needed to be added to belief in Christ. They appealed to reason: hadn't God prescribed for centuries what obedience meant? Doesn't everyone know that circumcision is the sign of belonging to God?

Paul answered them on their own terms. If they want to prove superiority by focusing on heritage and religious performance, he could outdo them all. He mentions four privileges that were his by birth: being circumcised on the 8th day as prescribed by law; being a full-blooded Israelite; having descended from a select tribe, Benjamin; and being a Hebrew who had not compromised his Jewish heritage to Greek culture. Then he added what he himself had chosen: he was a Pharisee, the strictest and most devoted to the law; he pulsates with a zeal that led him to persecute Christ-followers, and he was ritually blameless. Who could claim such a resume? Yet it is these very things that the Light exposed as empty, of no worth in making him righteous before God. He did not say they were bad in themselves, only that they could not bring spiritual life to a dead soul. Jesus said a similar thing to another Pharisee, Nicodemus, when he said only what originates from the Spirit of God is acceptable to God. What originates from our own effort is flesh and will never evolve into Spirit. We are foolish when we trust in ourselves.

Most of us are removed from Jewish culture, but all of us know the seduction of putting our confidence in who we are, what we know, what we possess, what we accomplish. We crave praise and approval. We know how easily and subtly our religious heritage and performance translate into entitlement and moral superiority. Spending time together in this letter is an opportunity to step into the light, to let Jesus name things in our lives for what they are. It is an invitation to talk to a friend about putting off dead things that bind us or to know the mutual encouragement found in a small group or prayer meeting. Spending time in this letter is an invitation to know Jesus and become more like him; it's an opportunity to encourage one another as we fellowship after worship by talking about what he said to us. Being alive in Christ brings joy even as we walk through deep valleys. He is our confidence and hope, and he'll never leave us or forget us.

PRAYER

Jesus, you are our confidence and life. You are the Light that exposes and heals. You have given us so many good things to enjoy, but they are fleeting and we turn unfilled to you. Will you use this time in Philippians to make us more like you in our joys and sorrows too? Make us ready to meet you! Amen

-Judy Vander Ark

DAY 3

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

If you could only eat one meal for the rest of your life, what would it be? We've all thought about a question like this. The essence of the question is, "If you could have only one type of food in your life, what would it be?" What if you could only have one thing in your life? Success. A good job. A healthy family. A spouse. Good health. All these things are good, but Paul called them "rubbish" in comparison to having Christ. Can you say that too?

Paul could have counted many things in his life as "gain" or advantage. But all the good things he enjoyed--the advantages he possessed from his heritage and from his own efforts that made him proud and self-reliant--are considered liabilities rather than assets. In other words, Paul is setting before the Philippians a re-evaluation of values, just as he had after the Damascus Road experience. This is the power of an encounter with Jesus Christ. It's a life-altering, value-reassessing experience.

It's a massive shift, but one that we are constantly having to take stock of. Our lives are filled with the same types of good things as Paul's--our heritage, nationality, social status, job, accomplishments, and family. Paul calls these things assets, things that we can count as useful or which work for our betterment and gain. Yet he also says that he counts them as a loss, or a liability, for the sake of loving Christ. Now that Paul knows Christ, he no longer needs these other good things to fill him up and give him worth. The same is true for us who know Christ. The knowledge of Jesus the Messiah and the work he has done reorients our allegiances. When Christ has our primary allegiance--the one thing in our life that has ultimate worth--all other competing allegiances are "rubbish" in the words of Paul.

PRAYER

Father, give us eyes to see and hearts to repent of the allegiances in our lives that aren't Jesus. These things are good, but cannot satisfy or give us righteousness. This is hard. But, Lord, we realize how necessary it is. Christ is all. May we see, feel, and experience that in our lives today, Lord, as you promise to work through the Spirit to reveal areas where we are trusting in other things over Christ. Give us repentance as we seek to trust in Christ alone, and forgiveness that comes from you. In Christ's name, Amen.

-Addison Hawkins

DAY 4

PHILIPPIANS 3:9

... 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—

Yesterday, we were reminded how the Apostle Paul models a radical, yet simple life. Imagine if we were able to test this out using a scale where all his earthly boasts were put on one side of the scale and his standing in Christ on the other? The side of Jesus would instantly smash into the ground with such an overwhelming weight that the whole slew of things on the opposite side would be flung into the air with such chaotic velocity that in a moment they would be but specks in the sky! The weight of Jesus' glory and our joy in knowing him easily takes on any adversary.

There's something about the overwhelming, all-consuming glory of God and his righteousness that makes our feeble resumes look trite. And it is right that we see our record of actions that way because even our "good deeds" are fraught, so much so that Paul calls them "rubbish" (see verse 8).

What is the mechanism that turns this "defeat" in a competition for bragging rights into Paul's ultimate source of joyful boasting? Paul has given up the endless pursuit of establishing a "righteousness of [his own] . . . from the law." What takes the place of it?

Paul sees that he has been made righteous; he has been justified in God's eyes. This absolute right and secure standing before the holy God is given to Paul and to us only as we come before God with faith in Jesus Christ. For it is by faith alone, empowered by the gracious work of the Holy Spirit alone, that we are saved.

We need the justification of the gospel not only because we make grave sinful mistakes. Certainly we do need forgiveness for those. However, our true need in the gospel lies in the fact that ultimately we are unable to dig ourselves out of the sinful mess we make. We need both our immense debt to be forgiven and our empty bank account to be credited. That's exactly what Jesus gives (imputes) to us when we find ourselves in him. The hymn writer Augustus Toplady puts in beautifully in the *Rock of Ages*:

*Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to thee for dress,
Helpless, look to thee for grace;
Foul, I to the Fountain fly;
Wash me, Savior, or I die.*

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, what an amazing gift it is that you would give us Jesus so that we might be called your sons and daughters. We don't deserve to know the sweetness of forgiveness, endurance of joy, or the security of righteousness. Yet you were pleased to crucify your Son on our behalf, so that we might be called children of God. We thank you, Father, that because of Jesus we are justified in your sight. Help us to taste the freedom of that today. In Jesus's name, Amen.

-Masakuni Hotta

DAY 5

PHILIPPIANS 3:10-11

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.

These are mighty sobering words, no matter how or when we read them. They could be part of the new membership pledge. They point to a level of Christian belief and behavior that can make it seem like the expectations for following Christ are beyond us or above our heads. There are three phrases that get to the heart of Paul's teaching here: know him; share his sufferings; and attain the resurrection from the dead.

We're more comfortable with the first phrase and its first object, Jesus. Those of us who have grown up in evangelical circles all quickly affirm our belief in the importance of *knowing* Jesus. We have frequently heard about the importance of having a relationship with Jesus, not just knowing about him. We generally know that knowledge of Jesus needs to be personal and experiential and not an academic exercise. We know we should be able to talk to Jesus and listen to the Lord in our prayer activities.

It gets tougher with the second phrase, "share his sufferings." We're more comfortable with that idea in theory than we are in actuality. The phrase sounds a bit masochistic. Why would I want to suffer? What we need to understand is that suffering is not suffering just for suffering's sake. It is a by-product of our relationship with Christ. Paul's teaching us to identify with Christ in every way we can--in both thought and action. If we do so, the inevitable by-product is suffering. We will be misunderstood. People sometimes won't like us when we speak the truth. Following Jesus will sometimes lead us into risky, even dangerous places. As Paul understood so well, it may even lead to giving up our lives for the gospel. God gives us the grace and courage to do so.

The third phrase sounds good, but it can seem remote and distant to us. We think the resurrection of the dead is somewhere off in the future. Many translations use the word "attain" in verse 11 to describe how we get the resurrection, but we don't use that word very often. That fact alone adds to the distance we feel from this idea. Fortunately, passages like Romans 6:1-11 make it clear that the resurrection experience isn't only something off in the distant future. It is a central part of our salvation now. The power of the resurrection sets us free from sin today. As Romans 6:4 explains, "just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." The power of the resurrection is with us as we get up and walk from our bedrooms to our kitchens to get breakfast. It is with us when we walk our dogs or as we converse with neighbors over the back fence. Its power enlightens our pathways throughout our whole lives.

PRAYER

Jesus, help us to identify with you completely. Take away our reservations and our selfish desires for security and self-preservation. Help us to understand that our security is in you for an eternity that starts today. May we glorify you through our belief and behavior as we walk in oneness with you.

-Richard Malone