

“Delighting In The Surpassing Worth Of Christ”

Philippians

Downtown

June 27, 2021

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.

*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[b] 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: 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; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law,[c] blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss **for the sake of Christ**. 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** 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— **that I may know him** and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. [emphasis added]*

Good morning family, as always its a blessing to be able to be with you. As always, I remain grateful for all of the ways that you all continue to support us so that we can continue being about the work of making disciples on Two Notch Road as a Jesus-Centered Family on Mission.

When we talk about being Jesus-Centered, one of the things that we mean is that **we are a people that center our lives, our faith, our hope, our identity, and our joy on His goodness.**

As a family of churches, we always want to be moving in that direction, and today, I get to preach on a passage that really pushes us towards being Jesus Centered **by reminding us of just how good Jesus truly is.**

On top of that, what I want to point out to you today from Philippians 3 is **something that's been on my heart for our Family of Churches for months.** Its an aspect of our faith that I believe we can really grow in, and as God grows us in it, I believe it will grow a deeply rooted sustained joy in our hearts.

And to get us into the topic, I want to start with our understanding of what makes us feel righteous... what makes us feel like we're good. So, to start us off, I want to ask you, what makes you feel righteous?

What makes you admire your own goodness? What makes you feel morally superior to other people?

See, I believe that we all play this game where we look to specific things about ourselves to make us feel righteous and/or morally superior to others. And there's multiple ways to do this, but you can often hear it in phrases like,

- "I mean, I'm not perfect or anything, but at least I'm not _____."
- "I'm not saying I'm the best person in the world, but at least I'm _____."

Or sometimes this game that we play, sounds like, "Man, **I can't believe anyone would do something like that.**" ... which implies that the wrong things that I do - my sins - are understandable, but that person over there, their sins, I just can't wrap my mind around them. They're a worse sinner than I am.

One of the easiest ways that we can see this game played today is through how some of us talk about people with different political beliefs than us.

- Quick example, for some people, being woke is a badge of honor, and they look down on everyone that doesn't hold to their views. Some people look down on anyone that claims to be woke. Both sides are often playing this game of finding their righteousness in their views on this topic.
- We do the same thing about being a progressive or a conservative. I see my stance/position as the moral high ground and I look down to people on the other side of the aisle.

And this game is particularly destructive in the church. Many people have come to a church and found out that this game is being played within the people of God, and because they don't know how to or just refuse to play the religious game where you put on your good church attendee face and pretend like you have everything together, they end up getting looked down on, and eventually they just check out, assuming that church just isn't for them... its for people who are better at measuring up.

And from the beginning, our Family of Churches has sought to say, "No, that's now how we're going to do things. We're going to be a Family of churches that finds our righteousness in Jesus and not in looking at the flaws and sins of others to prop ourselves up... **We're gonna put our hope in Jesus' goodness and not our own**"

And that is exactly what Paul is dealing with today. And what I love about this passage for our Family of Churches is that the Apostle doesn't just tell us not to play this self-righteous game, but he offers us a much much better solution that's way more fulfilling. Let's start in verse 1.

Philippians 3:1-3

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.

*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[b] and **glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—*** [emphasis added]

So... Paul just used the Word circumcision, and now I'm uncomfortable, and so, I don't know, I think we should probably talk about that. Here's what's going on...

In the Old Testament, when God made His covenant with His people that He would be their God and that they would be His people, a sign of that covenant was that the men would be circumcised. For a man to not be circumcised was for them to say that they didn't want to be a part of God's Covenant people. So, they would circumcise their boys when they were babies, once they were 8 days old.

The men would have likely been seen as the leaders or representatives of the households. So this may have been a reason for God having a sign of the covenant to be something that only men would participate in/endure. Some theologians refer to it as how the covenant people were "marked" as those set apart for God.

And because this act was so highly associated with being with God, it was **very easy for people to begin to believe that someone couldn't really be righteous if they weren't circumcised.** And this really didn't make sense for Christians because the Good News of Jesus is that we find our righteousness in Jesus!

Jesus lived a perfectly righteous life, and He takes our unrighteousness upon Himself and gives us His righteousness when He dies on the cross, so we don't earn righteousness before God through any work that we can accomplish.

But these people that Paul is calling dogs and evil doers and mutilators of the flesh are spreading the teaching that if you really want to be righteous and right with God, you have to be circumcised. Essentially, even though it looks very different from the way it looks for us, **they are playing the same game that we play.** Its using our works to prop ourselves up to ourselves or to God or to others.

And one of the things that stands out to me is the language that Paul uses when talking about these people. Like, obviously, its not good to spread wrong teaching, but is it really that big of a deal that he calls them evil doers? Is the teaching that God's acceptance of you and union with you is based off of how good you are at following a list of rules really that bad?

The answer is "yes".

Galatians 2:21

I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

To live as if we look to our own goodness to be seen as righteous, is to "nullify" God's grace (loving kindness) towards us. **It's to live as if His death wasn't effective.** To play this game where we as

Christians we look to our list of accomplishments to feel like we earned our relationship and union with God **is to live as if Christ died for nothing, Paul writes.**

To play this game is to go completely against the foundation of what we believe. We believe that we are saved by God's grace, His lovingkindness that we didn't earn but that is freely given to all that believe in Him!

And to give a helpful perspective on how we should think about circumcision for ourselves, he says this in verse 3.

Philippians 3:3

For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—

Without taking the time to go there, the first four verses in **Jeremiah 4** show us that what God was really after is what He calls a "circumcision of the heart" where we **cut off from our hearts things that would lead us away from God.**

So, we are the circumcision so to speak if the Holy Spirit is within us and working on us and making us more and more like Jesus and growing our love for Jesus.

And we put no confidence in the flesh. The term flesh is used in different ways in the bible so you have to look at the context. Sometimes it is used to refer to our sinful nature and our sinful desires and passions. Sometimes this word is used to refer to our physical bodies. I believe that is the way the term is being used here. I believe he's saying that we, as Christians, put no confidence in any work that we can do with our bodies to save us and make us right with God! And that is actually a mark of being a follower of Jesus. A mark of following Jesus is learning to and growing in not playing the game anymore!

And then the apostle goes on to say show that if anyone has reason to play the game, he does, but ultimately even he doesn't play the game because it's fruitless and empty.

Philippians 3:4-8

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:

Paul's point in vs 4-7 is that he has a long list of things that he could put confidence in. He's saying that he can check more boxes for being a good Jew and a good follower of God than others can

circumcised on the eighth day,

My family did it by the book, the way we were supposed to.

of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews;

He points to his Jewish heritage. He is a literal descendent of Abraham, whom God first made the covenant to.

as to the law, a Pharisee;

as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

He was zealous for His Jewish faith. He was a Pharisee, who were known for strict adherence to the law and teaching others to do the same.

But then He shows how much stock he puts in those things to be right with God in verse 7.

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss

He's saying that He puts no stock in them. He's not putting confidence in any of those things to save Him or to make Him right with God or to make God love Him more!

And right here in verse 7, He turns a corner in His argument as he begins to share an alternative to the religious game we often play. Let's finish verse 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. [emphasis added]

He's saying that all of those things that He could use to prop himself up so that he feels righteous before God and probably morally superior to others, he no longer places his hope in those things... why? Because living His life to know Christ is just better!

Surpassing means "superior, better, higher, supreme."

He's not trying to build a list of things that he can use to find a sense of self-righteousness in. He's trying to know Christ!

Listen, there is a huge difference between trying to do good things so you can be seen by yourself and other as a morally good person or as a good Christian or as someone who is respectable or acceptable in the eyes of others ... versus living a life that follows Christ because you want to know God more!

There's a huge difference between those two things, and the Apostle is sharing here that what he wants most is to know Christ.

Look back at verse 3:

Philippians 3:3

For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— [emphasis added]

He's saying that Christians are those who GLORY on Christ. That He is what we celebrate and enjoy and boast it.

The way an excited sports fan enjoys, celebrates, and boasts in their team winning a big game, is the way we as Christians enjoy, and celebrate, and boast in Christ.

My wife was a 3rd grade teacher for 4 years and she currently leads our kids and families ministry at Midtown Two notch. Based on those things, you can probably conclude that you know that she really loves children and is very kind and compassionate with Kids

But I know my wife. and I *know* that she deeply loves and is kind and compassionate with children. I know from what I've seen from her time and time again that she is so much more compassionate towards children than I am. I have been impacted and changed by seeing and witnessing how compassionate she is and in-tuned with what children are experiencing.

Its one thing to attain facts and knowledge about someone. Its another thing to enjoy the blessing of knowing someone.

Its one thing to have a mind full of theological statements and truths about God (and it is good to have that), but its another thing to enjoy knowing God.

If you know Paul's story, he was on his way to continue to persecute the church of Christ, and then Jesus knocks him off his horse as he's on the way to Damascus and saves him from his life of sin and completely changes his life. And Paul is like, I want to know Him!

And at the end of the verse, he says that he has "*suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ*" [emphasis added]

We often think about Paul's sacrifice being for the building of the Kingdom of God and joining God in His mission, and that is true, but here, I believe we get up underneath a lot of that and see what he truly is wanting to gain. He says that everything that he lost, he counts it as rubbish because he just wants more of Jesus! He just wants to know Him more. He just wants to fill His life more and more with who Christ is.

Sometimes, as pastors in our family of churches, we get together and ask, "What do our people need to hear from us? What needs to be preached?"

The last time we did that the thing that was on my heart the most is that, many of us don't like God... especially those of us that are lacking motivation to seek God, and talk to Him, and meditate on Him and aggressively fight against sin in our lives... We don't enjoy just having Him and being with Him. We don't feel positive emotions because of the fact that we are His and He is ours.

My heart breaks because there are so many of us across our Family of Churches that seemingly don't do anything on our own to cultivate spiritual health and joy in the Lord. We don't prioritize:

- Meditating on scripture
- Spending time in prayer

- Engaging in deep heart level conversations with other believers in LifeGroups and/or in other ways
- Generosity towards God's work

And ultimately, if we're honest, for many of us, its because we don't delight in God. We don't like God. Sure, we like some of the blessings He gives us, but we don't have an affectionate love for Him.

We love football, and the lake, and sex, and good food, and WandaVision, and the new Mighty Ducks thing on DISney+ which is really just the old Mighty Ducks, but whatever...

We have things that we love and that we enjoy having in our lives. Things that give us feelings of gladness and joy when we engage with them, things that have that surpassing worth in our lives.

But to be honest with you, for some of us God is not on the list of blessings in our lives that we really enjoy. We're not fond of God.

So (and), when:

- Someone challenges you and calls you to repentance from sin, you don't see that as a call to deeper and richer joy in Christ
- A preacher encourages you to spend time praying and reading and meditating on God's Word, it just sounds like white noise to you
- You're debating about whether or not you should come attend a worship Gathering like this one and sit under the teaching of the Word and sing praises to God, it just feels like you're choosing between something enjoyable you could be doing with your time or this dry, lifeless, mundane task that you gotta do to be a good Christian...

... instead of it being a joyful invitation to come and gain Christ.

Paul's beautiful example reveals to us that we don't see gaining Christ as we should. We don't desire Him as we ought. We don't see knowing Him as having "surpassing value.

So for the rest of our time I just want to help us grow more fond of God.

Psalm 16:11

You make known to me the path of life;

in your presence there is fullness of joy;

at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

It just makes sense right? If a married person came to you and said, "ya know, I just don't really enjoy my marriage anymore" and then they told you that they don't really make any effort to spend time with their spouse, the first thing you would likely tell them is that that needs to change asap.

And I often think about spending time with God in 2 ways:

1. Acknowledging His presence
2. Communicating with Him

You know how you can be in the same room with someone but not be really spending time with them because you aren't in any way acknowledging that they're there with you? Maybe that's because you're on your phone or something has you distracted. The truth is, God's presence is always with us. That never changes, but when it comes to spending time with and enjoying His presence, I believe that looks like acknowledging His presence.

Thinking about Him. Being mindful that He's always with you. Considering His goodness to you and His character throughout the day. Its so easy for us to go all the way through out day and not even think about God's active work in your life throughout the day or even remember and be grateful for the fact that He is with you throughout your day. Trying to find ways to remind yourself of God's presence and activity in your life on your good days and your bad days. Days at work and days your at home or in school.

We do that through intentionally meditating on His Word. This is how God speaks to us. If we want to hear from Him and know what He is like, let's start with His Word.

Psalm 119:103

*How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!*

So often in LifeGroups I've been in I've said and heard so many others say something like, its been a while since I've spent time in God's Word, but I did this morning and it was awesome! It was so good for my soul and my perspective today. I had more joy and patience throughout my day! Because God's words are sweeter than honey!

I want to ask you to not here there words as just some christian cliché. You need to spend time reading and meditating on the bible. You need it. Jesus says that man doesn't live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. You need it. Your soul needs it. You need it if you're going to have the deepest of joy in God.

And across our Family of Churches, we want you to enjoy this together with other believers as well as individually. I know for me I always seem to get more out of studying the bible with others than I get out of it when I study it on my own. We want you engaging in your LifeGroups in bible study time where you talk about what God is revealing to you in God's Word. We want others in your LifeGroup benefiting from what God is showing you and we want you to benefit from what God is sharing with them. And I also encourage you to seek out other times to spend in God's Word with other believers outside of your LifeGroup meeting time as well

We also do this through prayer. This is how we talk to God.

I Thessalonians 5:17

Pray without ceasing,

I heard one pastor say, something that has been very helpful for me when I have practiced it consistently. He said, "In your conversation with God. If you look at it as a cell phone conversation, never hit the hang up button. Never hit the red button. Leave it on all day and talk to him throughout the day.

Lamentations 2:19

Pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord!

I wanna encourage you throughout your day to see your heart as a pitcher of water, and whatever comes into your heart... be it:

- Joy or grief
- Celebration or mourning
- Gladness or sadness
- Gratitude or frustration

Pour it out to Him. Tell Him about it. Know that He loves to hear from you. And I believe as you begin to see God as such a friend that you naturally tell Him everything, you will begin to value His presence in your life more and more, and I believe your relationship with God will begin to feel more real to you.