

## **“To Know Christ”**

*Philippians 3:1-21*

*The key verse is Philippians 3:10-11, “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.”*

Apostle Paul is the forerunner of our faith. He lived on this earth as a shepherd and missionary. He called the life of faith a race (Hebrews 12:1). We are all running this race of faith. Moreover, a great cloud of witnesses has reached the goal first and are cheering us on. In this race it is essential to know exactly what your goal is. In this time, I pray that all of us may realize the true goal of our race and may gain spiritual strength to continue running.

In Verse 1 Apostle Paul says, "Rejoice in the Lord." In fact, from a human perspective, Apostle Paul wasn't necessarily in a place to rejoice. He was a convict in a Roman prison. He was a prisoner, so he lived in extreme poverty. With the occasional donations of the Philippian Christians, he was able to pull through. Even though he was allowed to teach the word of God in house arrest, he wasn't completely free. His situation resembles our current struggles in the many difficulties due to the corona pandemic. Covid-19 is causing a lot of difficulties for the lay missionaries. Because of this, we are experiencing challenges in the ministry of evangelism and self-supporting life. At such times it may not be easy for us to rejoice. However, Apostle Paul urges us to "rejoice in the Lord." In Jesus there is joy given by God. Jesus is the source of joy. Because Apostle Paul had joy in his heart through Jesus, he repeatedly urged the Philippians to rejoice as well. I pray that God will renew our joy in Jesus to us shepherds and missionaries in this time. Above all, I pray that you all will receive Jesus, the source of joy.

In verse 2 Apostle Paul tells the Philippians to watch out for three kinds of people. They are those who take their joy away from them, and those who prevent them from coming to Jesus, the source of joy.

First, “watch out for dogs”.

These “dogs” are faithful to the needs of the flesh. These people are those, described in verse 19, who serve their stomach as their god. They physically corrupt and destroy wholesome Christians. They are people who boast of shameful things. They only think about earthly things. Apostle Paul calls them ‘dogs’ because of his spiritual anger towards these people.

Second, watch out for “evildoers”.

Those people have no fear of God, and they openly commit worldly sins in the church. In church, they follow the sinful ways of the world.

Third, watch out for “those mutilators of the flesh”.

They consider the practice of circumcision as absolute. Most of them were Jewish by blood. They believed that human actions must be done to gain salvation and righteousness. So they put trust into their flesh and boasted about their human background and origin.

Look at verse 3. “For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—”.

Apostle Paul gives the Philippian believers a clear understanding for true circumcision. True circumcision refers to a person whose inner person has been circumcised. We call such a person “a true man of God.” Our circumcision was accomplished through the shedding of blood and death of Jesus, who is the Passover Lamb of God. When we believe in this Jesus, we receive the forgiveness of sins and baptism of the Holy Spirit from above. This is the spiritual circumcision we receive, and baptism of the Holy Spirit. These people of God carry out the ministry of the gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we will only boast of Jesus. In addition, human abilities and backgrounds are meaningless. They are not discouraged when we have no worldly qualifications.

Through this verse we can learn ‘What kind of person we want to live as in this generation?’ We can also learn, how we should raise up our sheep and children in the mission field. Thank God for establishing the true circumcision in our lives.

In verses 4 to 6 Apostle Paul introduces his past-self when he was confident in his flesh. He had many worldly qualifications that deserved to be acknowledged. Apostle Paul was circumcised on the 8th day of his life. He was a man of Israel by decent, and he belonged to the tribe of Benjamin. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews. Regarding the law, he was a Pharisee, and he was a passionate member of the Pharisees who persecuted the Church. As for the law, he was faultless. In a word, he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. He graduated summa cum laude from Gamaliel University, and was a promising Jewish leader.

But in verse 7-8 Apostle Paul says that he considers everything, his whole curriculum vitae, a loss. Loss is useless to man. For example, losses would be infectious diseases such as COVID-19, pests, and impurities in products. Apostle Paul went one step further and called these things rubbish or ‘garbage’.

It is garbage, isn't it? Not only is it very smelly, but it also does more harm than good. Why did Apostle Paul consider things that seemed to be quite useful as garbage?

First, because the worth of knowing Christ Jesus is surpassing all greatness of the world. Look at verse 8a. “What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” Apostle Paul says that knowing

Christ Jesus is most valuable. This is “the surpassing greatness/worth” (NIV) in English, which refers to the extraordinarily great, the best. There is nothing in the world that can be compared to knowing the Lord Jesus Christ. Worldly qualifications, human backgrounds, and knowledge do not help us at all to obtain the truth, salvation, and eternal life we truly look for. It just may get in the way. In John 6:63 Jesus says: “The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. “Yes, that’s right. It is the spirit that saves us, not the flesh. Putting trust in our lineage, worldly qualifications and in our educational background is of flesh. These things do not guarantee us eternal life and the kingdom of God. These things may temporarily saturate our hearts. These things prevent us from seeing our sinful and imperfect appearance before God. God's grace does not come to those who trust only in their achievements of this world (Isaiah 57:15).

But when we know the Lord Jesus Christ well, we can receive grace from God. In John 17:3 Jesus tells us. “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” When you know Jesus Christ, you receive the grace of the eternal life from above. To know someone is to have fellowship. And its end is unity. When we know Jesus, we become one with him. We receive this amazing grace, that Jesus remains in us, and we in Jesus. Jesus is God eternal, so we receive the eternal life in Him. In Jesus we can receive the joy God gives us.

Second, because it is that we “may gain Christ and to be found in him”.

Look at verse 8b to 9. “... for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, 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 is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.”

Apostle Paul wanted to gain Jesus Christ and be found in him. He calls this "the righteousness that comes from God and on the basis of faith." For the Jews, in the past and even today, the righteousness from God is a very important topic. They want to be justified by God such as their ancestor Abraham has experienced in the past. God's justification is God's approval. It is the acceptance as children of God and His people. It is the seal of being God's possession. Our heavenly fathers righteousness is not obtained by keeping the law or by the flesh alone. Abraham obtained God's righteousness at the time of uncircumcision, even before the Law of Moses, but by faith in God (Gen. 15:6; Ro 4:11).

Apostle Paul realized this spiritual mystery in Jesus how to obtain God's righteousness. In Romans 1:17, Apostle Paul boldly declares: “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.” When have we obtained God's righteousness? By believing in the gospel of Jesus Christ, we have received the justification from God. By believing in Jesus, we became the children of God. You have become God's holy people. By faith in Jesus, we have become the kingdom of priests of God in this age. By faith in Jesus, we have become shepherds and missionaries for this generation. Praise God who justified us by faith in Jesus and blessed our lives greatly.

Third, our goal in life is to know Christ.

Look at verse 10 to 11. "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead." Apostle Paul was justified by faith in Christ. This Paul now wants to grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, he wanted to know the power of Christ's resurrection and participate in His suffering. He wanted to know Jesus through actively following him. To know someone means to become one heart. It means to become His man. For us to know Jesus well, we must share in His suffering and participate in His death spiritually. Then we can know the true heart of Jesus. We can see the true image of Jesus. We will become a person of Jesus. Following the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Paul went to Asia Minor, which was the wasteland of the gospel, and then to Europe. It was a great hardship for him to go to places where the quality of the water, language, and culture were different. It is a great challenge itself to go to a foreign land to preach the Gospel, and to spiritually fight the sins that work in the evil spirits and sheep of the world. It was a great suffering to preach the gospel of Christ to those who worshiped various idols and to those who were carnal and proud. Moreover, when the sheep of the mission field slandered him, beat him with fists, and, moreover, was threatened by those who would not eat or drink until they killed Paul, his heart would have been in agony. He really would have thought he was going to die.

But while he endured these sufferings, at the same time, he looked at the glory of the resurrection and he experienced the power of salvation from Jesus. He got to know Jesus deeply.

Romans 1:16 "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile." When Apostle Paul suffered and preached the gospel of Jesus Christ, he faced a thrilling event in which dead people were brought back to life. He saw people from Asian Minor and Europe, not Jews, receiving the salvation from God. For Paul, this was the glory of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through pain and suffering Paul became a man of Jesus, who got to know Jesus well. Furthermore, he became a person who resembled Jesus. When was Apostle Paul the happiest? Perhaps it was when he personally experienced Jesus working throughout his life.

It must have been the time when God's power to deliver and save people flowed through him, and the resurrected Jesus appeared.

This time I look back at my life as an Austrian missionary over the past 25 years. For me, the Austrian mission field was like a wilderness. It was a place where there I had no financial stability and no one to rely on. In 1997, I was sent as a student missionary to Graz, the second largest city of Austria. For this, I changed my Ph.D. major from material science and engineering to chemical engineering. I changed my major not in the undergraduate course, but in the doctoral course, so every day was challenging and painful. I had to live financially independent and had to lay the foundation for the mission in Austria. Moreover, I had to study the doctoral course in the German

language and preach the Gospel, but my German skills were poor. The life of a student missionary itself was suffering and hard. But in this suffering, I met Jesus incarnate and God who sent him. Above all, God let me see the glory of the resurrection of Jesus Christ in such a suffering. God has given me the finance through a Korean Battery Research Institute so that I could complete the PhD-program as a student missionary in 6 years and serve the work of evangelism. In 2003, He made me to receive the PhD of Chemical Engineering from the Graz University of Technology in Austria. In 2005, He moved the Governor's heart so that my entire family could receive the Austrian citizenship. God allowed M. Sarah and me five children, being our joy from above in this missionary life which could have been lonely and dried. Through serving as a messenger and Bible Teacher, I saw the salvation of God coming down on the local sheep and our five children. In 2006, my family and M. Daniel's family started pioneering Vienna. However, we were not able to pay the deposit for the apartment, so I had to borrow money from my brother. Even though I came to serve the Austrians, the true state I was in was being an unemployed foreigner. But when I endured this hardship by faith in God patiently, I got a job at LG Electronics in Vienna with the help of missionary from Germany. In 2010, I got a job as a battery researcher at the Austrian Institute of Technology. If I think about it now, suffering in Jesus was a great opportunity to experience the grace of our Lord and His power of resurrection.

In the early last year, I had a hard time when I had to leave the Austrian research company. God taught me the holy character of Jesus in this hardship of being unemployed. I could have taken legal action in terms of unfair dismissal, but I honestly admitted that it was God's will and accepted the company's notice of dismissal. In the morning, I had time to repent deeply in front of God, writing a testimony of repentance based on the words of daily bread together with my wife M. Sarah Han. I believe that God was accepted my repentance and last year God made me experience the financial providence of a hundredfold like Isaac experienced it during the famine in Genesis 26 (Genesis 26:1-13). In early March of this year, I received a job offer from Europe's leading automotive design company. As being foreigner and as being a man in his mid-50s, this was a miracle for me. The dishonorable dismissal was truly embarrassing and painful to me, but it taught me the holy character of Jesus. Even now, many missionaries are striving to serve the gospel preaching and the ministry of making disciples with a self-supporting life as foreigners and strangers in their respective mission fields.

It may be very challenging. You may have not been able to sleep with the burden of this self-supporting life day by day, and your body may have been taking a toll on it. The hardships of self-supporting, learning the local language, and the hardships of visa extensions are all participating in the suffering of Jesus for us. Those who have overcome the suffering a little will find that there are other hardships that follow, for example challenges in serving the local sheep and your own children. Some missionaries are suffering from endemic diseases and infectious diseases. Many missionaries are suffering from the corona pandemic. There are those who have gone to the point of death and recovered. Unfortunately, there are also people who died.

There may be some who are hurt and suffer from ungraceful things in the community. We suffer many of these things for the Lord and the Gospel. However, we must learn Jesus Christ in these many sufferings. We must encounter Jesus. As we learn Jesus until the end and endure this suffering, we will see the glory of resurrection. Above all, you will see many spiritually-dead lives come to life. The suffering we are going through will give us the life-like rings of Jesus.

Look at v.12-14. "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

Here we find the honest confession of the Apostle Paul. He says he has not yet fully obtained Jesus. He tells the Philippian Saints, "Only I follow to catch what has been caught by Christ Jesus," and "I follow toward the goal to take the reward of God's calling in Christ Jesus." His goal was not the ends of Europe, nor pioneering Spain, which they thought was the end of the world at that time. It wasn't about gathering local sheep from Asia Minor or Europe or building a church with his name engraved on it.

His goal was to know Jesus. Furthermore, this is a reward from God's heavenly calling. If we seek to know Jesus and focus on the true goal, our life as a shepherd or missionary will be rewarded by God. This reward of God is the crown of eternal life and the crown of victory (2 Tim. 4:8). If we run to know Christ deeper, we will be rewarded with glory in the kingdom of God. But if our goal is wrong, all our hard work will be in vain. Instead of being rewarded by Jesus, we will receive punishment and shame is the fate for the unrighteous.

v.17 says "Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. Apostle Paul is telling the Philippians to follow his example." We usually tell others to follow Jesus instead of us. But Paul tells the Philippians to follow him. He was able to say this because Paul himself was living a life of mission with Christ as his goal. He knew that the direction of his life of faith was righteous before God, so he could encourage the sheep to follow him. Look at v. 20. "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,"

Apostle Paul clearly states that our citizenship is in heaven, the kingdom of God. We are citizens of the kingdom of God. Our hometown is the kingdom of God. The corona pandemic that we are all experiencing this time makes us hope in the God's kingdom. There is no hope on this earth. This earth is neither eternal nor safe. But God has prepared an eternal kingdom for us.

When we come to this kingdom, Jesus Christ will transform our lowly bodies and give us His glorious body of resurrection (21). Praise God for making us citizens of heaven through Jesus. Not only that, but we also praise God who will give us this amazing glory of resurrection.

In conclusion, we learned from the text that Apostle Paul carried out the mission of preaching the gospel in a foreign land with the goal of knowing Christ.

He runs well after Jesus, who is the goal, arrives at the finish line, and is cheering us on. I pray that we, like Apostle Paul, will continue running with the goal of knowing Christ. Praise the Lord for he is waiting at the finishing line with the heavenly reward. I am grateful that I can run a race of faith with our beloved shepherds and missionaries, brothers and sisters in Christ.

We are a team. We pray that we will comfort and love each other in Jesus and run to the end, to the goal. I pray that you will bless the race of faith of each, and every person gathered here. And for those who are tired and exhausted, give them strength and comfort to continue running. I pray that we will learn from Jesus and focus on Him to finish the race of faith until the end, and that you, God, may grant us a crown of victory when we cross the finishing line. Amen