

I Want To Know Christ

Philippians 3:1-21

Key Verse 3:10,11

“I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.”

In today’s passage, Paul shares the inner workings and thoughts of his heart. It’s one of the most personal messages Paul ever wrote. The Spirit established Paul as an example for all Christians, so let’s learn from Paul’s heart and passion for Christ.

Part 1 – Rejoice in the Lord

If we read the entire book of Philippians we learn that the Church of Philippi wasn’t doing well. They had a lot of unhealthy divisions, grumbling, arguing and personal grudges. The Philippians thought the problem was this person or that person but Paul revealed it was an issue of their hearts. Look at v. 1 *“Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.* Paul’s exhortation is non-judgmental but it points to a serious diagnosis; the heart of the Philippian church wasn’t rejoicing in Jesus. Like a beautiful bride, who lost the joy and excitement for her bridegroom, the Philippians weren’t “rejoic[ing] in the Lord” and had transformed into Bridezilla, an unhappy, unproductive, malfunctioning bride. In such a state,, the Philippians were vulnerable to evil influences that could further separate them from Christ.

Look at 2-3. *“Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. 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—*

Lurking around the churches of Paul’s time was a group of “dogs” known as Judaizers. They pretended to be Christians but they preached circumcision as a requirement to be saved. Paul labeled them “evildoers” because they directed people’s faith away from Christ and towards their own human effort. Their teaching was fraudulent, but in Christ is the genuine authority, so Paul wrote, *“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—”*

Judaizers circumcised men but there was no power in their work, they were just mutilating flesh. In Christ, however, is the real circumcision, the circumcision of the

heart that cuts away our old sinful person. Like Abram who became Abraham, we are a new creation, with a new identity, new direction and purpose. In Christ, is real power to serve God by his Spirit, so believers should “boast in Christ” and put “no confidence in the flesh.” Perhaps the Philippians didn’t rejoice in the Lord because they didn’t fully appreciate or comprehend the riches in Christ.

Part 2 – The Surpassing Worth of Knowing Christ Jesus

To help the Philippians appreciate Christ, Paul shares his forgotten resume of accomplishments. Look at v. 4b-6. *“If someone else thinks they have reasons to put 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; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.”*

Paul was once an accomplished man, but after knowing Christ, he abandoned his resume of successes. Look at verse 7. *“But whatever were gains to me, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.”* What a radical change of perspective, the things he once cherished as “gain,” he now considered worthless “loss.” What caused his mind to totally flip around?

Look at verse 8, *“What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ”* The mental flip occurred when Paul came to know “the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus...” The word “surpassing” means: incomparable and exceptionally outstanding. The value of knowing Christ was so surpassing that it made “all things” look like “garbage” in comparison. Paul’s value system reminds us of Jesus’ parable of “a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.” When the value of knowing Christ was discovered, Paul happily “lost all things” to “gain Christ”.

As I struggled with this passage it was undeniable that I didn’t have Paul’s clarity on the “surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus.” Of course I valued it very high but not enough where I consider “everything a loss” or even “garbage.” On the contrary, I regarded a lot of things “gain” that Paul viewed as “loss.”

For example, I started my Christian life as a totally lost Bible student but because of Jesus I grew disciplined and hardworking. At age 24, I gained a beautiful wife and a wonderful marriage. My wife and I worked hard and gained 6 healthy children. I worked hard and gained a position as a college professor. I continued to work hard and gained full time employment at Google. I gained some wealth. I went to the gym and gained physical fitness. I designed and built a house for my family and gained a home. Of course I worked hard for Jesus to teach the Bible on campus, to serve messages and

the body of Christ. I gained a good reputation and gained important responsibilities at LA UBF. After two decades I had my own resume of accomplishments.

I thought these things were “gains” because they weren’t easy to achieve and in truth most of them were God’s work, not my work. However, when I reviewed my life through this passage, my accomplishments lost their luster. I realized that I wasn’t living life to know Christ but was aimlessly seeking gain based on my own definition. Had my purpose been “the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus” I would have either done things differently or even skipped many efforts entirely.

I was especially convicted that I missed the point in regards to my marriage. I thought that to be a good husband I should try to provide for my wife and give her a fairytale marriage. When I took this approach, I only ended up pursuing pleasure and sexualizing our marriage. Even though I made sure we did lots of fun and exciting things together, my wife became rebellious and unthankful and for the first time, I started feeling flickers of hate towards her.

However, as I struggled with this message from Philippians 3, I realized that I had forgotten that the entire point of marriage is to know Christ Jesus! Jesus corrected me that I was not using marriage to know Him. Jesus helped me to repent in tears and put the focus of my marriage back on knowing Christ. I told my wife, “We need to use our marriage to know the profound mystery of Christ and the Church. Let’s earnestly seek Jesus together.” She lit up and grew more excited than any date night or fun vacation I could ever afford. We both jumped into the Word of God and prayed earnestly together for Jesus’ help to get our marriage back on track. In only a handful of days, we were totally fixed. My wife prayed that as the church submits to Christ, she would submit to me and not act rebellious and disrespectful anymore. As for me, I felt like a real husband again who wasn’t using his wife for himself but was loving her like Christ loves the church.

We asked, how can we know Christ more!? Jesus helped us to recognize that over 19 years, we had grown less and less dependent on Christ. In the early days we used to pray about everything but after gaining wealth, experience, knowledge and abilities we were relying on Christ less and less. We prayed to go back to the early days when we were weak but were strong because we depended on praying to Jesus. When the focus of our marriage was back on “the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus” we both were truly happy. Our marriage went from a 4 to a 10+

From this experience, Christ gave me a vision that I needed to seek to know Christ in everything I do or else it’s just going to be “loss.” So when I go to work and serve at my job, it’s to know Christ. As I raise a family, it’s to know Christ. As I serve the body of Christ, it’s to know Christ. Every relationship, commitment, plan and purpose is dedicated to knowing Christ. If something doesn’t help me or others to know Christ, I consider it garbage. Before God, I earnestly pray for such a life. I agree with Paul’s view because at the end of my life, all that will matter is knowing Christ. Amen.

Part 3 – I Want To Know Christ

With one single desire, to gain Christ, Paul shows us how he went about his goal. Look at verses 10-11. *“I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.”* When two believers come together, their mutual passion for Jesus brings them into fellowship. How can we have that same fellowship but directly with Christ? Some people call Jesus’ suffering in the garden of Gethsemane, his trial before the Sanhedrin, His death on the cross and His resurrection from the grave, the “passion of Christ.” It’s true, Jesus is passionate about sacrificial love to save lost sinners, Jesus is passionate about life-giving resurrection power. Paul was confident that he would know Christ as he focused on the very things Jesus died and resurrected for. Is there any doubts that we too will have fellowship with Jesus as we pursue the very things he cares about most?

So, here, we have the most important part of the message. If anyone wants to know Christ, they must live like Christ. To the degree we live as Christ lived, is the degree we will know Christ. Isn’t this Paul’s testimony here? When he embraced sufferings like Jesus, he also experienced resurrection power like Jesus. In many of his epistles, Paul mentions his experience of heavy sacrifice that led to restoration. As Paul lived like Christ, he came to know Christ.

Practically, living sacrificially can be very costly. It can feel too expensive, but we must remember that Jesus’ resurrection power is on the other side of suffering. Anyone who finds themselves poured out will also find life-giving power working deep within. A power that revitalizes, reanimates, refreshes our spirit and body. We shouldn’t view sacrifice as a bill that needs to be paid but as the means to know Christ and the power of his resurrection. Jesus’ story is our story as we live as Christ lived.

Look at v.12-14. *“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers and sisters, 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, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

God called us into a unity, oneness with Christ. The whole point of having a single hearted desire, to know Christ is so that we would push on towards the oneness that Christ took hold of us for. Oneness in Christ is the goal, knowing Christ is the way to take hold of it.

Look at verses 15-17. *“All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. 16 Only let us live up to what we have already attained. 17 Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do.”*

Are Paul's views on life too extreme? Is it necessary to "consider everything a loss," even "garbage?" Is wanting to "know Christ" the only thing of worth in this life? Are these just ideals for pastors and missionaries like Paul? No! Paul writes, "All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things." Paul's views on life, his desire to know Christ and his life that was dedicated to sacrifice are the views of the "mature." For this reason, Paul adds, "*Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do.*" Paul's heart's desire to "know Christ" is the "model" we must be adopting and driving towards. The Spirit established Paul as an "example" for us all to learn from. Healthy development and maturity in Christ means we're taking Paul's absolute view of knowing Christ as the only gain in this life.

Look at verses 18 to 20. "*18 For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their destiny is destruction, their God is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*"

Similar to Judaizers, there are many people today who don't emphasize complete confidence in Christ's work. They don't care about gaining and knowing Christ so they never talk about suffering and sacrifice that leads to Christ's resurrection power. Such people might call themselves Christian but in reality are "enemies of the cross" and are still "worldly."

As for us who learn from Paul's views, his example, and the model he puts forth for the "mature," we are only growing in our excitement for our "citizenship" in heaven. We are "eagerly" awaiting our Savior, The Lord Jesus Christ, because life on Earth has nothing to offer but "garbage." He will "transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body." Amen! Come Lord Jesus!

One Word: I want to know Christ