

Be Well In The Lord

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This morning, we'll be opening to God's word in Philippians chapter 3. And if you have your Bibles, please go ahead and turn to Philippians chapter 3, beginning in verse one. And if you will, out of respect for God's word, stand with me as I read verses 1-6.

Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe. Beware of dogs. Beware of evil workers. Beware of the concision. For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. Though I might also have confidence in the flesh, if any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

May God bless the reading of his word. You may be seated.

This morning, we're going to look at the absolute bankruptcy of human effort in the realm of salvation as well as in the realm of sanctification. You see, we live in a world that tells us to work harder. A world that says achieve more. A world that says build a great resume. But this gospel is entirely different. Religion is man's attempt to reach God through effort. The gospel is God reaching down to us dead sinners—nothing good in us—and doing the work for us.

In this text, we see the Apostle Paul transition from a theme of what you would call the best of the best human pedigree to the glorious reality of what God does—what God's sovereign grace does for us.

So let's look at verse one. What we're going to find here in verse one is a transitional word "finally." It doesn't mean that this is the last part of his message. It just simply means it's a transition from chapters 1 and 2 and now we arrive at chapter 3. We know there's still chapter 4. But he says, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord." Now, as you recall, Paul isn't mentioning this word rejoice many times for the first time here. But here in this part of the text, it's his emphasis. Why does he say that? Because he has taken the course of chapters 1 and 2 to explain why we rejoice. And he explained it's because of

what Jesus has done for us on our behalf. And he says, "Now remember everything I just explained in chapters 1 and 2 and rejoice in him—rejoice in what he has done for us."

And so in this verse, we can see the buildup, the crescendo of chapters 1 and 2, namely in chapter 1, we saw the text in Philippians 1:21 says, "For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain." He concludes the matter that everything I do from this point on as I am in Christ is to live for Christ. It's living in him. And if I die, it's a gain. It's not a loss. Remember, to the lost world, it's a loss when they die. No, to us, it's a gain.

And then we see in chapter 2 specifically to verse 5, he talks about the pattern of Christian living. Verse 5 says, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." And we go through verse 11 speaking about how the Lord Jesus Christ humbled himself all the way to the death on the cross and then God exalted him to glory sitting at the right hand of God the Father. And we saw the pattern work itself out in our brother Timothy and in brother Epaphroditus how the same thing has happened in their lives. Not in the context that they can be our salvation by no means but the fact that it is them being lowered and humbling themselves by the work of God's hand on them. And it is God that lifts them up in the right place, the right time.

And then we're going to see in chapter 3 verse 14 when we get there, just keep this in your mind, he's going to summarize. Paul's going to summarize here. You've been thinking, right? Like when is Paul going to talk about his testimony? He's talked about Timothy and Epaphroditus. Now he's going to talk about his testimony. And he's going to say it in verse 14: "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

So just keep that in mind that that's where we're going. That's where the text is going to drive towards. But let's just go back to the expression "finally." Paul here goes on now to another theme. There is a shift here. The emphasis that he wants us to understand is that the joy that remains is the same because the object of our joy does not change. So you can continue to rejoice in the Lord. He does not change like man. So your joy is consistent. It's constant. So he keeps reminding them the theme of joy and rejoicing over I believe at least 17 to 18 times already. He just continues to lay before them this important point.

Paul is not tired of asking the believers in Philippi to rejoice in the glorified Lord. That's why he says in chapter three verse one he says to write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous. It's not bothersome. I can keep telling you over and over again rejoice in the Lord, rejoice in the Lord, rejoice in the Lord. That's not grievous. It's not bothersome to me but for you—for us listening, the Philippians and us now today in the

context of the church—we are all here. It's for our safety. Proverbs 18:10 says this, "The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous run into it and it's safe."

So, we know what this means. We run to Christ. We run to Christ all of the time. Because the idea of rejoice, it means to be well. To be well in the Lord. It means to be joyful. The word joyful means to be full of joy. That's where you're going to find joy. Nothing in this world is going to bring that to you ever again. As long as you're in Christ, you can find it always. Just go to him. Go to him. Go to him. He's going to be your strong tower. He's going to protect you from all the stuff that he's going to lay down right now in verse two.

And so, this is key to our Christian life. He knows that if we rejoice in the Lord then he can call us the Philippians brothers in Christ, sisters in Christ. So whenever we speak to each other ask are you well in the Lord? Are you rejoicing in the Lord? Because if you are you are my brother, you are my sister in Christ. It's a great way to have the same pattern as Paul does to the church of Philippi.

And so let's continue to admonish this great truth that this is how we know we are brothers and sisters in Christ. It doesn't matter what our circumstances are. At the essence of the core of who we are and what we believe in is the Lord Jesus Christ. And in him we are well. We are well. We are full of joy. And so together we can rejoice in him. And that is what ultimately connects us as brothers in Christ one to another that we fellowship. And the idea of it is that you're talking about what you've experienced in the Lord and for the most part it should conclude I am so well because he is showing me so many things in my life that I could have never found in the world. I could have never found the closest of kin even amongst my biological brothers and sisters that as brothers and sisters of Christ we have this fellowship in the gospel that what Christ is doing in us it brings joy in our lives he's done amazing things in our salvation at the beginning of the cross right that it was our payment our sins paid on the cross fully paid it is finished and the wrath of God fully absorbed. So he no longer is angry with us, but he loves us. He's pleased with us.

And so and then that continues on through our life as a Christian that we constantly are being shaped and molded into what pleases God. And that every ministry that we do is because we want to glorify and exalt Christ. It's not about us anymore.

You see, that's the essence of it. When we focus less on ourselves, that's opportunity for joy. You see, why do most people are so sad and depressed and discouraged because they think too highly of themselves. That's the essence. That's why Paul is reiterating this point saying this is not grievous to you. It's not bothersome. It's so important to your life that the more you take your eyes off of yourselves and you fix your eyes on the Lord Jesus Christ and what he is doing in your life, you are well. Again, fully joyful.

I'm just going to keep saying this because Paul reminds me to say it to you. It is so well for us in the Lord. Whoever rejoices in the Lord is kept from the preoccupation with himself. The joy of the Lord, right, in Nehemiah 8:10, the joy of the Lord gives strength to live for the glory of the Lord. There it is. We have strength to live. Why? Because it's not about us anymore. It's about his strength empowering us to glorify him and then that just continues on in our lives. Get strength from the Lord and then he gives us the ability to live to glorify him and that just continues on and continues on and continues on.

Some things must be simply said repeatedly. Amen. Paul does not say it with the utter tone, when will you get this? He simply just says, "Remember, remember, rejoice in the Lord." Repeat it. Repeat it. Repeat it to each other. Say it constantly. If anyone is down here this morning or this week, hey, how are you well in the Lord? Are you rejoicing in the Lord? And that just reorients us to the right thing, the right attitude, the right approach to life. Amen. It's so good. Such a simple reminder, yet such a powerful backing behind it.

So, it's important to Paul, it's important to the Philippians. It's important to us here as a pastor of Calvary Road and to brothers and sisters in Christ to never forget what we are rejoicing in. And it is clear what precisely is meant by same things again. The repetition of rejoicing and joy. And we know that this is important to Paul. And so he's saying, "I'm teaching the same thing to you. I'm teaching the same thing to rejoice in the Lord." That nothing should disturb you. Nothing should give you more assurance to you Philippians that they are on the right track. As long as they are well in the Lord, you are on the right track. You're on the right path.

And so when views are constantly changing right left and right in the world, how many times in our lifetime have you seen things changing? Some in here are old enough to see cycles repeated. If you live long enough, you're going to see history repeat itself. Just live a couple more decades. Just live a little bit more. So nothing new is under the sun as it says in Ecclesiastes.

But we should not be disturbed when things are changing around us. Nothing should give us more assurance than being in Christ and being well in him. Because yes, everything in the world is uncertain. Yes, everything is constantly changing. We should always be aware of that. But always remember the object of your faith, the object of your joy never changes because Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. So we are secure in him even though everything around us feels insecure.

Here's one thing that the word of God does for us. It clears up a lot of things in our lives, doesn't it? That's what the word of God does. And we should do so much more of that in our lives. We should fill our minds with more of the good news and the word of God than

the bad news of the world. As strong as that desire is, because our nature just loves bad things because of our fallen state, you have to constantly turn away from desiring what you want to hear. We love gossip. That's why there's gossip shows, drama shows. Why are they so top of the list? Because our flesh loves it.

But just because our flesh likes it, is that a good thing? No. It can destroy us. It can destroy our witness. It can destroy the way we talk to each other. Always talking about bad things instead of good things. Right? Paul's saying, "Talk about good things, rejoicing in the Lord, being well in the Lord." And that's how we can be Christ followers and be a light and salt to the world.

So again, he wants to constantly keep this in our minds, in our focus. Don't let people throw you off this track. Don't let them trouble you. The word of God is exactly the same and sure today as it was in past centuries.

So Paul repeatedly commands believers to rejoice in the Lord signifying that this joy is to be constant in our lives in and out day in day out. This is what our life should signify more than anything else in the world because we are entirely changed from the inside out. We don't need to base our lives on circumstances anymore. Get that? That's so important. Your life is not based on circumstances anymore. It's constant. It never changes. We can always experience joy right now, tomorrow, next week, next month, next year, decades in, decades out.

So because our joy is rooted again in the relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, he's all that we need to carry us through. We often say it, but do you live that? And do you feel that? Or is it just an intellectual thing? Yes, it's joy, but do you really feel that in your life? Are you secure in that joy? Because it's not a mental thing like, oh yeah, I know he loves me. That's not good enough. Paul's saying, that's not good enough. You must rejoice in the Lord, not about the Lord from a distance. No, he's right there with you. He will carry you through all of life's troubles.

And so joy keeps us from being preoccupied with ourselves. Okay? So if you're thinking about loving yourselves, just go back to what the Lord Jesus Christ wants us to do.

Now, by this anchoring, he goes on into verse two because there's a warning that there are going to be people trying to take away that joy from your life. Going to try to take what's true and help you to believe something false. This is what the world does to us, doesn't it? It's like when suddenly when you have more truth in your life, suddenly more attacks happen, right? Why? Because it's a spiritual battle.

Remember back in Epaphroditus, he's a fellow worker and a fellow soldier. Right? It's a spiritual battle. The more truth you know, the more the enemy knows and he's going to

try to pour lies upon you, evil upon you, more and more. It doesn't get easier, does it? But here's the thing, the more secure you'll feel. And the more you'll notice how much your anchor is really holding on to Christ. The foundation will be known in the trials, right? When the storm comes, were you built on the rock or on the sand? And who's the one that's bringing the storm, by the way? God.

And so, he wants to see, are you truly a believer? Because when the storm comes, we're going to find out where your true foundation is. And so, verse two, he goes on with three "beware's." This is Paul using it to emphasize this word beware because these individuals are going to try to undermine your faith and separate you believer from Christ and from the joy in him. Know that everyone that is false is going to try to take you to being shaky in your foundation in your faith. They're going to try to separate you from Christ and then ultimately your joy is going to be sucked out. And that's why he emphasizes this at the very beginning.

So Paul issues three warnings. Beware of dogs. Beware of evil workers. Beware of the concision.

Beware of dogs. Essentially is saying watch out for people's character because that's where it starts. It's the inner man. Who you are inside will be revealed in your outside world. And so everything that is of this inner man that is of a dog. And I'll explain what that is, but he says beware of the characters that act like dogs. And then beware of evil workers. Those who spew lies. That's what evil is. It's lies, right? Who's the father of lies? Satan. Beware of evil workers that lie. And then beware of concision, outward works, action, efforts, right?

It's not just words that these people do. They tell you to do something to earn your salvation and earn to please God. So there it is. So why such harsh language? Why does Paul go so hard on these people? Because Paul is warning against those who teach human effort is required for salvation. That's it. And then what they're going to do is you got to keep doing these things. You got to keep doing effort in your life in your sanctification. Bad to the core, bad to the end.

And so Paul does not use flattering terminologies whatsoever. He's going to use the most harshest word, right? Paul's really good at words. So he says beware of dogs. So let's go back to first century because dogs were not domesticated pets. It's not a pet that you would just bring into your home. Typically they would be roaming around the streets in the first century. They were wild, filthy scavengers. They were not nice pets that will like to be touched. No, they will eat your hand. They go and eat from the garbage pails. They were not domesticated whatsoever. They're wild beasts roaming in the streets. So Paul is

not referring to animals here. Clearly he's not talking about dogs specifically, but we get some insight.

If we go back to the prophecy of Isaiah who warned against false prophets of his days, he says in Isaiah 56:10, his watchmen are blind. They are all ignorant. They are all dumb dogs. They cannot bark, sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber.

Isaiah was warning the people against the false prophets of his day who were attempting to comfort his people and telling them that everything was fine instead of warning them like a dog is supposed to do. You see, they were silent, these dogs, these false prophets, when it came to warning them of what's to come, a disaster. And the northern kingdom at the time of Israel was already gone into captivity. And then the false prophets were going to go and attack now the southern kingdom and they were just going to ruthlessly tear as dogs would tear things apart.

Same idea just tear these people apart. And he was calling these false prophets dumb because they weren't doing what they're supposed to do. These false prophets are false because they're not doing what is true, right? And they won't speak out and they won't tell it as it is.

So dogs were often they would just point out certain things in their lives. Oh, just be well. Just slumber, just sit around and be okay with things, you know? Yeah, there in the future it's going to happen, but you know what? Right now, just stay comfortable. Isn't that a lot of today, right? Anytime you hear comforting words outside the context of scripture tends to not be the right thing. Live a comfortable life. Live just like everyone else, right? Seek comfort as much as possible. Isn't that what it is in affluent countries like our country today? Just seek more comfort.

But is a Christian life all about comfort? No. Right? When you're growing, there's always going to be discomfort. And as a good father, he doesn't want you to just stay comfortable and just be immature and stay the way you are in your comfort. But he wants to change and transform you into the person that you are supposed to be. And that gets you out of your comfort zone, doesn't it? Because our flesh loves comfort, right? Why did Eve want to get the apple? Because she didn't have to work hard anymore. She thought, oh, Adam, he has to work so hard. Let's just eat this apple and we'll just get all the wisdom intelligence and forget about God.

And you see that that's where it all comes down to is are you living truthfully according to God's will or are you living falsely and actually living for yourself? False prophets were living for themselves, for their glory, for their gain, and they were just eating up people left and right.

And there's again just this danger from living a comfortable life. There is no such thing as a comfortable life if you're a Christian. So it's a reminder to those maybe in this room who are possibly dealing with stuff that are sinful. And those people that are living sinful lives tend to not want to hear the truth. Right? If you're living a sinful life right now, you're living in gross immorality, you're living in gross sin, you are tending to not want to hear the truth.

On the opposite end, another example I'm going to give is someone who may have cancer. What does that person want to hear, but everything else is a truth that he has cancer? So, what I'm trying to say is there's two opposite extremes. One extreme is I want to just live the way that I am. Don't tell me the truth. Another side of the extreme is tell me because something is wrong with me. I just need to hear the truth. Where are you in that spectrum? Because you are either on one camp or the other.

And God's word is like a surgical knife. And he will by God's word extract the very thing from your heart and show you what your sins are. He will reveal everything that's false in your life. Do you care to listen? He will also tell you the cure, amen, to your sin, namely the Lord Jesus Christ, having been saved in him and him alone.

You see, both camps are not comfortable, is it? You're going to be stirred up. You're going to be stirred up with your sin. Don't be comfortable in it. At the same time, you know, I don't want to hear false comfort because I'm going to die if I don't hear the truth. Another way of putting it.

See, that's what a true prophet does. A true pastor does is to tell the truth as it is according to God's word, for your good. Paul is telling you for your good.

So he uses these strong words of these false prophets that comfort their people when they should be warned. And so Isaiah likens the false prophets to dumb dogs. Paul uses this term to describe false teachers as well. Specifically, we're now going to go into the Judaizers, okay? And they were highlighted as living sinful lives. So, they were not living pure lives. They were living vicious lives trying to mutilate the flesh. And they lived uncontrolled character. They had an uncontrolled character, meaning that they were just wild people like dogs. They were all over the place. They were inconsistent in what they were saying. Do this, don't do that, do this, don't do that, do this. It's just all about you, you, you.

And you don't have no peace when you live like that. Amen. So, the prophet Isaiah warned against false prophets. Again, referring to them as dumb. And God commands that truth be spoken even when it isn't comfortable.

So, let's go to evil workers. Now, beware of evil workers. People who induce evil things under the guise of working for Christ. That's the worst, isn't it? They call themselves believers and they're actually evil workers. They're wolves amongst sheep's clothing, right?

Because any attempt to please God in our own effort, why is it so dangerous? Because anything to please God by our own efforts draws attention away from Christ's accomplished redemption. Anything that takes our eyes off of the full redemption that Christ has done for us is evil. Amen. It's evil. And making it the worst kind of wickedness to turn your eyes from Jesus is the worst kind of evil. And this is what Paul accentuates to these specific people.

Now going on, beware of the concision. He speaks of false circumcision. That's why he doesn't even use the word circumcision. He uses this abbreviated concision. What does that mean? It's a word play on circumcision by which he means reintroducing the law. Reintroducing the law and people who mutilate what Christ accomplished. Basically saying it was not enough what Christ has done on the cross to say it bluntly. This is evil. It's concision. It's divisive. That's what concision means.

And so by the way Paul dealt with the Judaizers back in Galatia to the Galatian church and this was approximately 8 to 12 years apart from writing to the church at Philippi. So these Judaizers were following Paul on his missionary trips. They were just following him along. And what they would do is Paul would preach and then they would just hide behind and then when Paul's gone, he would go and whisper to their ears, "What Paul said is not true. You got to do this. You got to do that. What he said about grace is that's not true." They were just always trying to destroy Paul's words.

And this is the Judaizers. They're out to no good. They were just a bunch of busy bodies, right? That expression busy bodies, they were just busy for no real purpose, no nothing that pleases God.

So Paul creates this bitter play on words, calling them the concision, which means to cut down, to mutilate by trying to introduce the law and human effort into the church. And they were spiritually ultimately mutilating what Christ had perfectly accomplished. Perfect. It is finished. Right? What he has done on the cross was perfect. And they're trying to make things imperfect by Judaizing.

So God warns to not rely on these physical rituals that they're introducing into the church. And ironically this spiritual symbol of circumcision of the heart, they use it he uses this word as a physical mutilation. All it is is that you're just mutilating your body for mutilating your body's sake. Has no end purpose, nothing whatsoever.

And so he goes on in verse three. Look down with me in verse three. Now he's going to explain. For we are the circumcision which worship God in the spirit and rejoice in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh.

Verse three answers with for we are the circumcision. Notice that true believers do not merely possess an external symbol. They've actually been cleansed of our sins by Christ on the tree on the cross. And so true circumcision is of the heart, not of exterior symbols anymore. It is a new birth, a completely new heart, a regenerated heart that has an attitude towards God and pleasing him and glorifying him that only he can create in us. Because by default we love to pride in our glory.

And so it has to be that circumcision of the heart, a change of heart. And only he can do it. Only God can do it in Christ Jesus.

And we hear about this spiritual circumcision in Colossians 2:11. It says this, "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands and putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ."

So when he died under the judgment of God against sin, you died there with him. That's what it means. We died there with him vicarious death.

We are the true circumcision and those who are really separate from evil. Paul views this here not from the negative side but from the positive side. And so he cites three characteristics. They belong to those who are the true circumcision. Number one he answers the three with three. He identifies three marks of those who are truly circumcised in the heart.

Number one, God's spirit empowers our worship. He's the one that empowers us. He says right there in the first part that we worship God in the spirit. This is most important. We no longer worship ourselves. We worship God. A change of heart. That is the first thing that God does. We begin to just worship him. And in the spirit means the inner man. The inner man has been changed and transformed to worship no longer self but God.

And when we have that first characteristic in us that molds us and changes us from the inside out, our character is then formed in the way that is explained in the next part of the passage which he goes on and he says this in verse three and rejoice in Christ Jesus. He repeats verse one again.

Why do we rejoice? Because of what Christ has done for us. What Christ has done for us. We can rejoice in him. He repeats that again and again. He's not bothered by this at all. And so should we not be as well. And then he goes on and he says, "And have no confidence in the flesh."

You see, one of the things that happens to us is we stop talking about I I and we talk about Christ Jesus. Christ Jesus. Christ Jesus. This is who we constantly want to speak of and not of ourselves. And so God removes our confidence in the flesh, the eye in us. Paul means man's unredeemed humanness. By the way, the unredeemed part of our flesh. It's not specifically talking about sin in the flesh. He's just talking about this unredeemed body.

We're going to be redeemed one day in our glorification. Whether Christ comes here to earth or in our death, then we will have a redeemed body. But until then, we are still living in this unredeemed body which is called the flesh.

And so in this as a true believer, we have this flesh that has this ability to not please God. So this is where you know Paul talks about the spirit versus the flesh. The spirit wants to please God, worship God, rejoice in Christ Jesus. But our flesh wants to say, well, I can do better or I don't need this or I want to please myself.

You see that there's that battle within us. We want to please ourselves rather than God in our flesh. And we don't want to look to ourselves for salvation. But the flesh just loves to want to save himself, redeem himself, please himself.

And so in this Christian life, we have to always realize we have this old nature. And unless Christ intervenes in our lives again and again and again, we'll constantly be going back to our flesh.

And so let's look at verses four through six. Verse four starts with though I might also have confidence in the flesh. So let's just stop there.

What we're going to see here is Paul's life and his resume. Okay, he's going to now share his testimony here. And he's going to show seven of these privileges. The first four is going to be privileges inherited by birth. Meaning he didn't have to do anything to receive these privileges. He was born into these things. But then the next three are things that he actually did in his flesh. Okay? So that's how these are organized.

And so let's look at the four privileges inherited right off the bat with his birth. No human involvement here. First circumcised the eighth day. Here is referencing that he had godly parents. It wasn't him circumcising on the eighth day. He was just 8 days old. He had to have godly parents that took him on the eighth day to be circumcised. So this was following the Mosaic law perfectly.

All right? And then he goes on to of the stock of Israel here is referencing that his genealogy is pure. It's going back all the way to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Jacob's name was renamed to Israel. That's what it means here. The stock of Israel. I follow this pure

genealogy all the way back from Abraham through Israel and on. So he was saying I'm a direct descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

And then he goes on of the tribe of Benjamin. This is like saying that he belongs to the best family in the whole world. Look at my family. I come from the best family in the world. You see, this was an elite tribe in the house of Israel as it were because it was the line where David came from, David's dynasty. And so this was also the first tribe where Israel's first king came, Saul. So just notice Paul's name was Saul, right? So he's tracing it back to Saul, first king.

And then we go on to Benjamin. This tribe of Benjamin. You see, Benjamin was a favorite son of old Jacob. Jacob loved Benjamin. Loved him. He loved him so much. But let me just throw something from that time of Old Testament. Rachel had just given birth to Benjamin and she died at birth. If you recall in Genesis that she actually died giving birth to Benjamin. And when she died, she called Benjamin son of my sorrow. Son of my sorrow. And then Jacob renamed him son of my right hand. Basically, he's close to me. I love him. My favorite. Another way of saying he's my favorite son out of all my sons.

And so he's referring to that point in time. And so he's saying, I have the best family, the tribe of Benjamin. And so he said it, he's saying pride here. Just so much pride in this part. And then he goes on, he says a Hebrew of the Hebrews. Here he's going into talking about he's a great leader. He's a Hebrew of the Hebrews. Another way of putting it, the top 1% of the 1%. Another way of putting it in today's terms, he was at the top, the elite leader of all the Hebrews.

And so he's saying like, I am at the highest level of religious life. If you want to talk about religious life, I own it. I am at the top 1%. And so he's saying he followed the Hebrew tradition all the way from his ancestors all the way to now at his age. And that again this is all inherited. I'm the top here. I'm the best here. I'm this and that.

And then now we go into the three privileges gained by action. This is now what Paul actually did in human effort. And by the way at the peak of human effort. He goes on and says as touching the law a Pharisee. He said the Pharisees at the time represent the very best in Israel. Very best. So he's like, I'm going to go to the best school, the best of the society at the time. And they were, by the way, a religious and political party. So think of like a conservative right-wing group or something like that, right? Just a lot of religion and politics involved in the Pharisees. They were very much plugged into the politics. In fact, when they were in Rome, they were the ones that would change politics around. That's how much influence they had in Rome.

And what was their aim? What was the Pharisees main aim? Their aim was to establish the kingdom here on earth. That was their goal. So, it's already bad. All right? They

thought they were going to establish a kingdom here and they're going to do their very best to get everyone together politically, religiously, and just let's just make this all about the kingdom.

And they had arisen after the captivity of Israel and they believed in the integrity of the scriptures. And what did that mean? They believed in angels. They believed in the resurrection. They believed in miracles. They were extremely wise in knowing scripture. They could quote scripture. They memorized the scriptures. They quoted the five books of the Bible and even some of the Old Testament beyond the Pentateuch. So they were very much wise in scripture. They understood scripture to being able to memorize it and to quote it from thin air.

And so that was them religiously. They took pride in that they knew the Bible at least to that point well. But then they were also political figures. They were entering into political fields and they were getting to the top of the political climate. And so you had that as well with the Pharisees. And so they thought, okay, we're strong in the religion of the world and we're strong in politics. Our group, the Pharisees, were going to bring in the kingdom. That's what they thought in their minds. And by the way, they found ways to manipulate on both sides, right? The religious, they'll talk about politics and religion, and then politics, they would talk about religion. It would just be all mixed up.

And then he goes on to say the next thing is zeal persecuting the church. Here this word zeal it means all in. He was all in to persecuting the church because he loved the Pharisees. So it was as strong on the opposite side. He hated everyone that disagreed with the Pharisees. That love-hate relationship.

And this is what he meant by zeal. Just as much as I love being a Pharisee, I hate everyone that doesn't agree with us. And he's going to do whatever it takes, even persecuting the church. He hated everything that threatened the Pharisees. And you know, at the time, this is Paul right here. The Pharisees were persecuting just people in Jerusalem in the place that they were residing in. What Paul wanted to do. He said, "I want to persecute not just people in Jerusalem, but all over the world. I want to be known as the one that persecutes everyone in the world."

That was his mentality. He's like, "I'm going to do everything all in. If we're going to do this, let's do it right in his mind." That's what he thought. Let's go and persecute everyone in the world.

And Paul thought he was doing God's will in it. He thought that by persecuting the church that he was pleasing God. And the other Pharisees were willing to relax and say, "Calm down, Paul." as it were. He's saying, "No, no, we're going to run these Christians

out from all over the world. We're going to make the Pharisees known who we are." That's kind of what he was trying to do.

And Paul determined to just take away all of the Christians all over the world. I'll go more into his testimony, but let's go on to the next part, the last one. He said, "Blameless under the law." Notice that he doesn't say sinless. He doesn't say perfection. He says blameless. Very important why he use this word because we see in Romans 7:7 Paul tells us his story. He says I had not known sin but by the law for I had not known lust except the law had said thou shalt not covet.

So he understood the law and he knew it really well. And as long as the law says this, I'm not going to do this. And so he was blameless in that. He was following the law. That's the word he uses, the language that he uses here. So outwardly, what it means, he was blameless. No one can violate him for what he was doing according to the law. He's not talking about inward work, right? Nothing about sin here. Just according to the law, I was blameless. I didn't violate anything. He brought the proper sacrifices to make things right before God. Externally. He thought he did everything externally right.

But what we'll find out this is not the end of his story.

Before God opened his eyes, Paul thought all these things were a credit to him. If you could think of bookkeeping, he thought all this was a credit to him. That look, God's going to say one day, look at Paul, he did such a wonderful job. He thought in his mind that's what he was going to receive. But God had a different story for him. Had a different path for him altogether.

And so like a man he was traveling to Damascus. You remember I told you about he wanted to just persecute the whole church all over the world. At that time he was determined to do that being all in in this effort. And what did Christ do? He blinded him.

It's an analogy that what you're seeing, Paul, it's all wrong. It's all wrong.

What you thought was right was all wrong. So, think about this. He's rehearsing to us all the way back to Abraham all of the good things that has happened in his life. He's reminding the people like, "You want to know a pedigree? I've got the story to tell you." And he goes, "In one day, one day out of all the thousands of years of good things, God woke me up like that." He shot everything that I thought was externally good and he put a blindness to it. Said that none of that matters. None of that matters.

And what happened with Paul? The person that he was going to persecute, think about this. This is God right here, right? Remember Ananias, he's a brother in Christ. If his eyes

were open and he was going to go and do what he was going to do, what do you think Ananias's fate was going to be?

So God blinds him. God blinds him. Changes whole disposition. He's helpless. You see, that's where we need to be. We need to be absolutely helpless. We need someone to rescue us.

And that's what happened with Paul. You see, he thought he was doing all these good things, but at the end of the day, it didn't mean anything. He needed to be rescued from that. So, what is your story? What is your story? What are you holding on to that you think is going to please God one day and then know that all of it was to your wrath?

When is that moment going to happen? If you're not a believer this morning, when is that opportunity going to be for you? That's what we pray for. We pray for that. You have that moment where one day all that is just nothing.

And now the people that you hate in yourself, he changes you. And now he takes the scales like Ananias did with Paul. Removes his scales from his eyes. It's a picture of a new way of looking things. And the person he looks at, the one he would hate, he now loves.

You see what God does? He's going to bring people in your life that you hate deep down. You can give your smile, right? I used to do that. But then when that change happens, the people that you hated, now you love as a brother and sister in Christ. You love the people in the church. He removes that scale from your eyes. And now going forward, it's like, man, my family, my history, my success, all that's done.

Because what does he say in verse seven? But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

Is that you? All the stuff, the good things we might think of. Is it all counted loss for Christ? And you see, Christ is everything. Christ is everything. You notice every time Christ is mentioned, it's not Christ and I have a wonderful family and I have a wonderful job and so on and so on. He says, "I need Christ and that's all I need."

Rejoice in the Lord. That's it. Rejoice in Christ Jesus. That's it.

Is that your life? All you need is him.

And for us, brothers and sisters, that's all we need of him. Amen. In the course of this life, as we go on serving the Lord and wanting to please God, we just need to stay close to him. He'll open doors. He will bring people to us. He will help us give us strength and power to do ministry that pleases him. We just need to wait upon him. I often say this to

our people is God only shows me one step at a time. He doesn't show me the whole thing. You know why? Because it's going to discourage me. Oh, I got to experience that pain. Oh, I got to experience that up and down. Oh, it's going to go great and then I'm going to go down this way. It will be nuts, right? So God protects us from that. He just wants to take us one step at a time. That's what sanctification is. It's one step at a time. And we just got to trust him every step.

And he will show us more and more and more. And when he does, it's good to live that way, doesn't it? It's not dependent upon us, but just to simply depend upon him every step of the way.

May God bless this in our church. He is doing a great work here. He is. I see it. And may we continue to bless in this way. Amen.

Let's pray. Father, thank you. Thank you. Thank you for the generous grace that you give to your people. That nothing is dependent upon us, but it wholly rests on Christ's finished work on the cross and what he continues to finish in our lives. That what he has begun in us, he will complete it until the day of the Lord. Help us to always rejoice in the Lord. To always remind ourselves that we are well. We are well in the Lord. No matter what our circumstances may be, we are well in him. We are full of joy.

And we need to constantly be full of the joy because Lord, our flesh desires to bring that joy down to diminish the word of God and to change the inner man to feel depleted. And Lord, we don't want to ever be like that ever again. We want to be fully secure in our inner man. We want to be fully resting in your word and constantly being fed in your word, being a renewing of our mind. And we want to constantly serve with our body as a living sacrifice which is a reasonable service.

Help us to live in this fashion for this kind of glory that not glories in us but glories in you and you alone. And I pray father for those that don't yet understand what I'm talking about, have not experienced what I'm sharing, what Paul has shared about rejoicing in the Lord. I pray father that you would God work in their hearts. Show them truly how empty they are. That nothing that they might think is a credit is actually worthless. It is all counted loss.

And may they find it all loss and then find all in all in Christ Jesus alone. May they rest in him. May they find comfort in him. May they find safety in him. Because above all he is the only one that will bring us to victory in this life and all the way to the life to come. Help them father in this way and bless this end. Bring conversions here father please that they may glorify you in Jesus name. Amen.