

Philippians 3 – The Joy of Knowing Jesus

Good morning, Fellowship. How are you this morning? It's good to be with you today. If you have been with us the last few weeks, you know we have been in the book of Philippians in a series called, "The Joyful Journey." This morning, we're going to be in chapter 3 – so go ahead and turn there with me this morning.

I will never forget the Saturday my dad said, "Richard, get in the truck. We're going for a drive." Moments later, we pulled into an empty junior high school parking lot. He got out and told me to slide over to drive. It was a manual transmission, so I did the whole erk, erk, erk, as I figured out how to navigate my feet. As my lessons continued over weeks and months, my dad taught me to how drive but also to be a polite driver – someone who let other's in and out of parking lots, someone who let others in front of me when they used a blinker, someone who waved to people who did the same for me.

A few years later, I was trying to be the kind of driver my dad taught me to be. I was in the right lane of two – stuck at a red light. A woman in her car was exiting a parking lot, turning left. I gave her room to exit and as she started to pull out I looked in my side view mirror and saw a car coming. I immediately began waving and yelling from my car, "No! Wait! Stop! There's a car coming!" But she couldn't hear me and didn't see me. The car smashed into the driver's side door. I still remember her ducking out of the way to prevent injury. Her car was destroyed. Thankfully, the only injury she had was some shock. I felt terrible – wishing I could have prevented her from that experience.

Have you ever been that woman? Someone warned you about something and you either ignored the warning or looking back realize you missed the warning that was right in front of you? Or, maybe there was a situation where you were the warner? You saw a friend or family member going towards danger and you warned them but they didn't listen? Looking back, you wish you they listened or you gave more warning. I imagine most of us have had that experience in life – usually with people we care about deeply.

If you have been with us, you know that Paul has a deep love and care for the church at Philippi and because of that – he sends them an urgent warning and an encouragement – both of which are still relevant for us today. Let's take a look at the warning first.

3 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. ²Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. ³For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— ⁴though 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: ⁵circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee;⁶as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

Have you ever "fortune-cookie" the Bible? You know – where you say, "Ok, God. I am going to open this and wherever it lands I trust You have a word for me." If you did that to this passage – you'd be a bit confused. Look at verse 2. Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. Did you hear the warning? Look out! Look out! Look out! For we are the circumcision, those of us who worship through the Spirit of God and glory in Christ – and those of us who have not put any confidence in the flesh. Like I said, confusing passage to jump into. Look out! Look out! Look out! Dogs. Evildoers. Mutilation. Circumcision. What in the world is going on here?

If we travel back in time – all the way back to Genesis 17, God makes a covenant with a man named Abraham. God tells him that he will be the father to a multitude of nations, nations and kings will descend from him, and that this covenant is for all of his descendants. To show his commitment to the covenant, he and all of his descendants must commit to a public symbol to show their devotion. Circumcision. Yikes. Y'all – if I am adult Abraham, I am asking God to re-negotiate the terms of this deal.

Moving forward, when a boy is 8-days old, he needs to be circumcised. Abraham and his people agree to the terms and make the practice customary – marking them as God's chosen people. As the nation grows, the Israelites begin placing such confidence in possession of the physical mark itself that they felt their election – their being God's people – was secure even if their hearts strayed after other gods. In other words, "God, I am physically marked as yours even if my heart has no affection or love for you."

If you follow the Jewish religion, you know that some of the people in this faith-system begin to not just focus on circumcision, but on all external behavior – attempting to follow the Old Testament Law as religiously and legalistically as possible. It was the following of the Law – changing external behavior in order to gain favor with the Lord – to gain salvation. In other words, as long you looked good externally, you were okay. You just needed to keep up with a moral life. It was a white-knuckled, self-disciplined approach to God's Word. Sound familiar to anyone here today?

Back to Philippians 3. Paul is warning the Philippians that there's a group of people – called Judaizers – who are saying that circumcision is still necessary for salvation – that there is still a physical – outward conformity that must take place in addition to faith in Jesus. The Judaizers are saying, "You need faith in Christ but you also need to be circumcised for salvation and to be God's chosen people." They're preaching a false gospel because they're saying you need Jesus + something else. Paul's concerned that the Philippians may begin to buy into this thinking.

That's the warning: Don't add anything to the gospel.

If anything is added to the gospel, it's no longer the gospel. If we say salvation requires us placing our faith in Jesus + anything else – we have created a false gospel. In verse 3, the real gospel is the circumcision of the heart – the changing of the heart by the Holy Spirit and Jesus – not confidence in the flesh. The gospel is faith in Jesus and Jesus alone. It's not, place your faith in Jesus Christ and then add these other rules in. It's Jesus and Jesus alone. If I follow the rules but I don't follow and know Jesus – I am believing in a false gospel.

The danger in adding anything to the gospel is that we are saying Jesus' life, death, and resurrection weren't enough. We're saying that God needs our help – our morality – our rule-following for this thing to take. We're saying, "God – your grace isn't sufficient. You need me for my salvation." That creates instability in our relationship with Him. Because if I follow all of the rules perfectly – then I am good. But what happens when I mess up? Because I will. Then what? In this system, I don't have freedom. I am bound to a set of rules that strip me of the joy in Christ – joy I am meant to have. Instead of being able to approach Him in confidence, I am always left wondering if I am good enough. The reality is I was never good enough. That's why I need the true gospel – Jesus and Jesus alone.

So, how do I know if I am a Judaizer? How do I know if I am leaning on my own morality or leaning on Jesus? How do I know if I have added anything to the gospel? Here are some questions we can ask ourselves:

- When I obey – do I thank God for His grace that gives me the privilege and the ability to live for Him? Or does my obedience cause pride to swell up in me? Look at what I did in my own strength!
- When I disobey – do I believe God still delights in me? Or when I disobey does it cause shame and fear? Do I find myself hiding from the Lord or others?
- Do I compare myself to others when I obey/disobey? Do I judge or delight in the failings of others? Am I jealous when others succeed?

A false gospel requires your morality. The true gospel doesn't. A false gospel creates instability in your relationship with the Lord. The true gospel gives confidence and joy. The true gospel means God loves you no matter what – He delights in you. He still loves you – even when you sin. He hasn't moved on from you. You don't have to hide or run or live in fear. You don't have to earn His love or salvation or live in your own strength.

Many of you know our story. When Erin and I met she had a 4-year old daughter. A year later, Erin and I got married and even Isabel referred to it as “our wedding.” A year into our marriage, we were able to go to the court **(SHOW PICTURE)** and with the help of our own Bruce Long – I was able to adopt Isabel and she was able to take on my last name. That was 9 years ago on November 30th. Now imagine this. The judge makes her ruling and signs the document and I pull Isabel to the side and say, “Hey, listen. I am really excited about this adoption but I need you to know there are a few rules you're going to have to live by to be considered mine. Here's your list. Don't talk back. Don't have an attitude when you turn 13. Stay away from boys until you're 35. Keep your room spotless. As long as you do that, we're good. If not, you don't belong. Can you imagine the insecurity that would create in her – the instability we would have in our relationship? She'd always be wondering – does he love me? Do I matter? She'd exhaust herself. She'd be insecure.

I wouldn't dare make her agree to those terms to be mine. I relished that opportunity. She's my daughter. I delight in her – even when she breaks the rules. In the gospel, when God looks at you – He sees Jesus. You have His righteousness – not your own. He doesn't need your morality. He wants it. But He doesn't need it.

So, the warning from Paul to the Philippians – don't add anything to the gospel.

Let's get back into our passage because I want to see the encouragement Paul is going to give us. In verse 4, Paul adopts the Judaizers thinking to prove a point. Only one person could put confidence in the flesh, Paul. He was circumcised on the 8th day – like we read in Genesis 17 and he was of the nation of Israel meaning he was 100% Jewish by race and descent. He was a member of the tribe of Benjamin – a line of people that provided warriors to the nation. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews – meaning he grew up strictly observing and obeying Jewish customs and he would have learned Hebrew in order to study the Old Testament in its original language. He was a Pharisee – an elite group that was given this title as a sign of honor and respect. He was zealous for his faith – even to the point that before his conversion to Christianity he was persecuting Christians – some to the point of death. According to the Old Testament Law, he was blameless. Meaning he regulated his external behavior to be in line with Scripture and the times he did “sin” he dealt with his sin as the Law required. Paul's pedigree, his actions, and his zeal were unmatched. He was the LeBron James of being Jewish.

In modern times it would be like saying: Every man in my family has been a pastor for 12 generations. I was dedicated to the Lord as a baby. We went to family camp. In high school I was a “Jesus Freak,” I kissed dating goodbye and started wearing my purity ring. I went to DC Talk's last concert. I know all of the hand motions to “Every Move I Make.” I haven't missed a

church service in years and when I did – I watched it online the next week. I tithe. I don't get into arguments with my spouse on the way to church. I teach Sunday School. I'm in an accountability group. And I still...still wear a WWJD bracelet.

What does Paul say about his behavior? What does he say about having pedigree, abilities, training, and right – moral behavior? Look at verse 7.

⁷But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.⁸Indeed, 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 ⁹and 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— ¹⁰that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in his death, ¹¹that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

In short, his best wasn't good enough in light of who Jesus is. It's all rubbish. The word translated there literally means, “dung.” Compared to Jesus – pedigree, morality, and training are all garbage. They don't matter. They don't give life, joy, or salvation. The same is true for us. **Our best isn't good enough because our best isn't Jesus. This is particularly important for all us achievers in the room. If I achieve much but I miss Jesus - I didn't achieve anything.**

"Like most 'religious' people today, Paul had enough morality to keep him out of trouble, but not enough righteousness to get him into heaven! It was not bad things that kept Paul away from Jesus—it was good things! He had to lose his 'religion' to find salvation." – Wiersbe. He had to realize his life didn't matter if it didn't revolve around Jesus.

You know what does matter according to Paul? Knowing Jesus. That's all that matters. Verse 8: “I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord...it's all garbage if it means I can be found in Him and have His righteousness – righteousness that doesn't come from behavior but from faith.”

Paul urges us to know Jesus. That's the encouragement this morning. The word “knowing” in this passage refers to a relational or experiential knowing – not intellectual assent. If you have to give up everything you worked for – your reputation and status – but you get Jesus – you win. All that matters is to be found in Him and given a righteousness that only He can give through faith and faith in Him alone – not righteousness through our own behavior. Paul wants us to know Him even when we suffer – that we know the power of His resurrection when life is in the pits and that through suffering – we would become even more like Him. **I want to encourage you to know Him this morning with three simple challenges.**

Know there's more to know. Paul says, “there is surpassing worth in knowing Jesus, He wants to be found in Him, that He may know Him, and become like Him.” Even when you think you know Him really well – even if you are spending hours at a time on a daily basis in His Word – there is still more to know. I heard another pastor say this week, “Because Jesus is infinite, there is always more to know.” I want to confess to you – I needed that reminder this week. As a “professional” Christian – I can sometimes delude myself into thinking, “I know Him enough.” I don't want to know Him enough. I want to know Him completely. When I stop pursuing Him – I begin to operate in my own power and strength and it leads to morality instead of a Christ-enriched, redemptive pursuit of life. I need to know Him in the midst of all circumstances of life – whether I am in the mundane or as Paul shared – even when I am in the midst of suffering.

I remember my grandmother telling me about a love story. When this couple was first married, she sat right next to him in the cab of his truck. They would hold hands. She would snuggle up

next to him as they drove through town. They would talk. There was intimacy and connection. Years later, the wife was sitting against the passenger side door and asked, "What happened to us? We used to be so in love and so close. Now look at us. Look at the space between us." And the husband responded, "Sweetheart, I haven't moved." Some of us need to move closer to the Lord this week knowing there's more to know about Him. And that leads to the next encouragement:

Pursue what makes you want to know Him more. Know there's more to know and pursue what makes you want to know Him more. This will certainly involve Scripture, prayer and other spiritual disciplines. But it will also involve other things that stir you up. My list: going for a run, hanging out with friends around a firepit and having real, in-depth conversation, listening to "secular" music with Truth-filled lyrics that point me to Jesus, watching movies/shows that have gospel-symbolism throughout, a good cup of coffee, and being around water – the lake, the ocean, a pond. I don't care. And if I can combine some of those things – even better. Taking time to breathe and be still. Imagining myself singing before His throne. "As often as I could, I placed myself as a worshiper before him, fixing my mind upon his holy presence, recalling it when I found it wandering from him. This proved to be an exercise frequently painful, yet I persisted through all difficulties." – Brother Lawrence. This practice drew Him to the Lord.

What stirs up your affections for the Lord? What makes you want to know Him more? What's on your list? Pursue those this week.

Know there's more to know. Pursue what makes you want to know Him more. Give your past to Him and keep your eyes forward. Look at verse 12. "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make (perfection) my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own. One thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on..."

There are some of you here and you are daily, weekly, monthly being reminded of a shame-filled past. You are constantly reminded of the impact of your sin. I have to imagine this is part of what Paul was referring to. Before Christ, persecuted and even helped murder Christians. In fact, he was on his way to do more of that when Jesus intersected his life and changed Him. For some of you, your past is keeping you from knowing Him more because you can't imagine a world where He loves you. That means you're adding to the gospel. It's not about your behavior or your sins – past, present, or future. He loves you and wants you to **know Him** so you might become more like Him.

There are others of you, you're relying on your past for a different reason. You are still relying on a decision to trust Christ from twenty years ago. You are still relying on this moment when you knew Him instead of knowing Him now. Paul could easily have depended on His encounter with Jesus – this miraculous, supernatural encounter – to be the story He always told or relied on. But it's not. He chose to know Him. The guy who wrote most of the New Testament says, "I want to know Him more!"

Knowing Jesus is only possible because of faith in Him and in Him alone. In the 1800s, John G. Paton was a missionary to the South Pacific Islands. Twenty years earlier, missionaries on that island were killed and eaten by cannibals. One older friend tried to persuade Paton from going to the island saying, "John, you will be eaten by cannibals." He replied, "Friend, you are advanced in years now, and soon you will be laid in the grave, there to be eaten by worms. I confess to you, that if I can but live and die serving and honoring the Lord, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by cannibals or by worms."

He went. He labored to translate the Bible into the people's language and when he came upon the word, "faith," he couldn't think of an appropriate word. One day he heard one of the villagers crying for help, "Please, may I come and lean heavily upon you?" It struck him. That was it. Faith is leaning heavily upon Christ.

I want to encourage you, friends, to know Jesus. I want to encourage you to lean heavily upon Him to put faith in Him and not yourself. Let Him uphold you, empower you, change you, perfect you as you lean into and know Him – no matter where you're at, no matter what you've done. Press into Him. Even the apostle Paul wanted to know Him, to grow, to press on and I hope you will to – that you might be filled with Joy on your Journey.