

An Ardent Desire To Know Christ

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[0:00] We're going to look at Philippians 3, 1 through 16, and then a couple other passages, Matthew and Luke's gospel. But this is the word of God. It says, finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.

To write the same things to you is no trouble to me, and it is safe for you. Look out for the dogs. Look out for the evildoers. Look out for those who mutilate the flesh.

For we are the circumcision who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus, put no confidence in the flesh. Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also.

If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have far more. Circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin. A Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the law of Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church.

As to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I count as loss for the sake of Christ.

[1:04] Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish.

In order that I may gain Christ and be found in him. Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ. The righteousness from God that depends on faith.

That I may know him and the power of his resurrection. And may share the sufferings, becoming like him in his death. That by any means possible, I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained it. This am already perfect. But I press on to make it my own. Because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do. Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead. I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Jesus Christ or Christ Jesus.

[2:12] Let those of us who are mature think this way. And if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have obtained.

And then from Matthew chapter 16. Then Jesus told his disciples, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it.

And whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?

And then from Luke chapter 9. And he said to all, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it.

But whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? This is the word of God.

[3 : 18] Thank you. You can be seated. We are looking at these two texts. Yes, really Matthew and Luke obviously are saying the same things.

And not just these two passages in Matthew and Luke, but there are others in the Gospels. Where Jesus kept telling his disciples. Not only was he going to go suffer and die in Jerusalem, but they would need to follow him.

In the same pattern of denying themselves and taking up their cross and following him. So as I thought about this passage from Philippians, which is our main passage.

I begin to see that I think there's some parallels. Some very clear parallels between what Jesus, what Paul describes as his experience and what Jesus says and calls us to in these two passages in Matthew and Luke.

So look at it this way. Jesus said you must come after me. Paul says that I might know him. I want to know him.

[4 : 25] Jesus said you must deny yourself. Paul says I counted all rubbish. I counted all loss. Jesus said take up his cross.

Take up your cross. Paul says my desire is to share in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death. And then Jesus said whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

And Paul says his goal. I want to attain the resurrection from the dead. You see those parallels? As I think about this, it seems to me that the words of Christ in the Gospels are somewhat harsh.

They sort of bring us up short. They cause us to react. They cause us maybe to think, well, gosh, this isn't really, it's not natural, is it?

It's not natural to deny yourself. It's not natural to be willing to physically die or to die to yourself. Our natural desire, of course, is always to protect ourselves, to protect what we have, to protect our own, to build our own little kingdoms, our own little worlds, to be the ruler of our little reign, whatever it is.

[5 : 50] But in doing that, we become like the farmer in Jesus' parable of the rich farmer who has a great abundant harvest.

And he says in the parable, the farmer says, I'm going to build larger barns. I'm going to store all this grain. And I'll be rich. And I'll have wealth.

And I will be, I'm going to be well off into my old age. And at the end of that parable, Jesus says that God says, fool, this night your soul is required of you.

He was building his own kingdom, concerned about his own wealth and future. But God says that's foolish. It's stupidity.

So to follow Jesus, to me, as I'm thinking about this theme, to me, to follow Jesus, as he tells us in these passages in Matthew and Luke, is really to know Jesus.

[6 : 58] And as believers, all of us have been called, those of us who are believers, we've been called by the Spirit of God to know him.

Because in God's gracious provision, he has delivered us from the kingdom of Satan and transferred us to his glorious kingdom.

And this liberation results in a great transformation that has tremendous repercussions in our lives. In our life now, as well as the future.

Again, it seems to me that in many ways, we are like the demon-possessed men or man, depending on which gospel you read. Then Mark 5, in this case, they were men, two men, that were so violently possessed by demons that no one could restrain them.

They were like beasts. They were wild. They lived in the graveyard. And yet Christ came. And with simple words of his authority, he sets them free.

[8 : 08] The demons are cast out. They go into a herd of swine. The swine run down the hill into the lake and drowned. That man or those men were transformed.

That's the same thing that happens to all who trusted the Lord Jesus Christ. There's a transformation that takes place in our hearts, in our lives, our being.

It's not maybe as dramatic as having a host of demons cast out of us. But it's a real transformation. And it works out over time.

So where are we going with this? I'm going to give you a thought of it. This is going to be like a conclusion at the beginning of a sermon. But I think we have a slide coming up here. This is what a key thought that I want us to take away today.

That each of us is called by God to know him in complete fullness. To know God so intimately that our selfish desires are swallowed up into one consuming desire to know him more completely.

[9 : 11] And this second part is very important. Knowing him, knowing Christ, knowing the Father is not related to your vocation.

What I mean by that, we might think that those who are called to vocational ministry, pastors, missionaries, those that are somehow involved in some type of full-time ministry, that somehow they know God or are closer to God than others.

Can I just tell you that that's not true? You can be, well, anybody involved in vocational ministry knows that this is true.

It can be there in your heart, your mind, your thoughts. Your whole being can just be very, very far away from God.

There's no desire to really know him. So it's not according to our vocation. It's according to God's calling, though, in your life, in my life.

[10 : 18] If you are a believer trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, then God is calling you to know him. And it's not dependent on any time or place in life that you encounter yourself, whether you're young or old, whether you are still working or retired, whether you are a student, employee or employer.

You get what I'm going at here. It's not, it's inside of you. It's internal. It's related to the transformation that God is working in you.

But Paul has and expresses this very ardent desire to know Christ. Now, he did know Christ. But he wants to know him better.

He wants to know him more deeply, more fully. So let's just look briefly now and then at the passage itself in Philippians, where Paul mentions what I'm going to say in this way.

He's giving us the positive view of what we might perceive Jesus' words to be negative. Okay, does that make sense?

[11 : 36] Paul's giving us like a mirror or a reflection. We're seeing the same thing but from two opposite viewpoints. And as we read Paul's description, it helps, I think, really for us to understand what Jesus was telling us about denying ourselves and taking up our cross and following him.

It sounds so negative, so destructive. This can't be right. I can't do this. But Paul's saying, look, this is what I've encountered. So look at verses 7 through 8.

Paul, in finishing it, he's saying, look, this is the, I count all these things but lost. They're like rubbish. They're garbage. They're, they're, well, the really bad word would be, yeah, yeah, yeah, you got that.

All right. All right. All right. I mean, they don't come out to anything. Look, and he says, I have my heritage. I'm an Israelite. I'm of the tribe of Benjamin.

I'm a Hebrew of Hebrews. My heritage. Great thing to be proud of. Then he says, look at my religious observances. I was circumcised the eighth day.

[12:50] Of course, he didn't have any part in that, in the terms of decision making, but his parents did. But look, I fulfilled all of the things in the law. I received the sign of the covenant that God made with Abraham.

And I have been a Pharisee, a keeper of the moral law, the external law. I've done it all. And then I'm zealous.

Look at me, my zeal. I persecuted the church. I was so zealous for my faith, my Jewish heritage, that I was willing to go after these Jews who had said they believed or were believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But now, that's my pedigree. He says, that's why I'm important. I was looked up to. People thought I was really something. I was the best of the best.

But if knowing God could be measured in who you are and what you do, well, then, yes, you would have something to boast about. But Paul tells us that these accomplishments, these things that he has done, his standing is of no importance.

[14:05] Because what I have found in Christ is so much better. There's no comparison. Listen, this is rubbish. I mean, this is garbage. This is smelly.

But this is great. This is wonderful. This is like the difference between fool's gold and gold. You know, fool's gold is a metal.

It has a nice shine. It has a nice crystalline structure. But basically, it's worth nothing. It's a nice little doodad maybe to have in your rock collection.

But basically, fool's gold is not worth anything. You're not going to get rich collecting fool's gold. But gold. Hmm.

Gold. Did you know that I look up this on the Internet? Great thing to have the Internet in it. Right now, approximately an ounce of gold, one ounce, is worth \$4,600.

[15:09] \$4,600. That means a pound of gold. If you had a pound of gold, you would have \$733,600. If you had a pound of fool's gold, eh, nice.

But it ain't worth anything. That's the comparison. What I had, Paul, saying was, eh, in comparison to Christ, nothing.

It's foolishness. It's rubbish. It's garbage. But what I have in Christ is so much better. It's like, I have all the wealth of the world.

So Paul was confronted then by the living and resurrected Christ. Remember, Christ encountered him on that road to Damascus as he was going to persecute the Christians who were in Damascus.

Between Jerusalem and Damascus. He's traveling. His ardent desire at that point, I'm going to get rid of these people. We're going to snuff this newfound idea that this Christ or this Jesus is the Christ, is the Messiah.

[16:25] But then he was transformed. He encountered the living God. He didn't know the living God before that. And that's really, I think, important for us to take note of.

You could be religious. You could be a church goer. You could be an honest person. You could be a hardworking person. You could be what our world and our culture today would call a good person.

But not know God. Paul encountered the living God, the living Christ. And so now he says, tells us in these verses in Philippians, my deep desires to know him more deeply.

So much so that I'm ready to share in his sufferings. I'm ready to become like him in his death. I'm following my Lord Jesus Christ. I'm denying myself and taking up my cross because I want to know him.

I don't want to just know about him. I want to know him experientially, day by day, day in and day out.

[17:34] Whatever I'm doing, wherever I'm going, I want him to be glorified. I want to know him. That's his ardent desire. Do you all get, I can't hardly get sheets of paper separated anymore.

Unless I wet my fingertip. It's really aggravating. I don't know if it's aging or what the thing is. But anyway. So now I want to just briefly look at a couple more things about this passage.

I think things in a more practical way, in a more, well, practical. More concrete, perhaps.

In the sense of, in this way, how? First answer is, how do we go on with Christ? And then, what will keep us on this path?

How and then what? And I think Paul gives us the responses very clearly. First of all, and how do we go on with Christ? How do we grow in our desire to know him?

[18:48] And verses 1 and 2 give us the answers. First of all, in verse 1, he says, rejoice in the Lord. And in verse 2, he says, look out for the dogs.

Now, these are commandments. In the original Greek, this is in the form of a command. This is a mandate. Sorry, I'm going to start thinking in Spanish here.

But first of all, rejoice in the Lord. He says, this is a safeguard for you. And it helps me also. Rejoice and then look out.

So, how do these relate? When I think, what I believe Paul is telling us here, what I'm understanding and rejoice in the Lord is Paul's telling us, look at what Christ has done for you.

Look at what you have experienced. Look at, see, remember how you have been liberated from destructive patterns in your life. Rejoice in what God has done for you and his son.

[19:53] Rejoice in the Lord. Let us be like those whom we encounter in the Gospels. Men and women, children broken by their sin, who were outcasts from their society.

They were the lepers and the deaf and the blind and the lame and the demon-possessed. They were those who were near death that were brought, given health, and they were those, some who died who were brought back from the dead.

We're just like them. We share in the same humanity. So remember that. Rejoice in the Lord.

Remember. Remember what God has done for you, where you came from, because that's going to help you. It's going to give you a growing desire to know this Lord more.

And then he says, on the opposite side, look out for the dogs, the evil workers, those who mutilate the flesh. Now, these are those who were coming into the church in that first century, known elsewhere as the Judaizers, who were coming in and telling the Gentile Christians in particular, listen, it's not just enough that you believe in the Savior.

[21:12] You've got to do this and this and this and this and this. You've got to be circumcised. You need to obey all the law, the ceremonial laws.

In other words, what Christ has done for you is incomplete, is what they were saying, what they believed, what they were teaching. Unfortunately.

And Paul opposed them continually. So rejoice, but then beware, because these people will come into the midst and they will take away your joy.

They're going to tell you, now you can do some things to make God love you. You can do some things to make yourself more acceptable to God.

You can do some things. And Paul's saying, you can't. Beware of their influence. Beware of those that are going to tell you, add something to what Christ has done.

[22:14] They want you to boast. You can boast in yourself because they boast in themselves and they want company. So beware.

Those are two very simple things, aren't they? Two commandments. Rejoice and beware. But I do believe they go together and they're put together by Paul at the very beginning of this chapter.

But then what will keep us on this path of life? In verse 12, he says this, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

In other words, I'll put it in my own words, it's God's working in you. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. God is working in you. It's not just going to occur to you one day, out of the blue, a desire and a desire to know who God is and who Christ is.

No, it starts with him. It starts with him because Christ Jesus has made me his own. The center of my being has been transformed, Paul says.

[23:22] And that's the power of the gospel. Then recognize that you are on a journey. We're not at the end of this journey.

We won't be at the end of this journey until our physical life ends. And even then, we still have a part of the journey to come in the future resurrection of our bodies.

So Paul says, he says he recognizes, I've not already obtained it or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own. Christian life is a journey.

Don't, we become discouraged. Let me just put it that way. We become discouraged, don't we? Even as I was thinking about this text, this sermon, it can be very discouraging.

So I think, I don't see sometimes a lot of desire in my being, in my life. to know Christ. And I'm sure many of you have those times also.

[24:28] I don't think I'm that different than anybody. So, recognize you're on a journey. It's not, we haven't gotten to the end yet. And God is at work in us.

We go forth one day at a time, one act of obedience or disobedience. when we're being molded through the Father's love, his loving discipline. He's leading us to die more and more to ourselves, to live more and more to our Lord Jesus Christ, to know him.

And then another very important, I'll call it a recommendation, but what Paul is telling us in these final verses and verses, well, sorry, I didn't write it down.

not that I have already obtained it, but I press on. Okay. I do not consider that I have made it, but one thing I do, there we go, forgetting what lies behind, I press on to what lies ahead.

It's part of being in that journey. The past is, you know, really and truly, the past can sometimes be our greatest enemy and obstacle to faith in Christ, to the sense that we are even progressing.

[25:48] It can discourage us so greatly. And we can become so focused on our past failures that we cannot see a better future.

And we can become so discouraged because we fear that we're going to fall again. But Paul, I think this, I'll put it this way, Paul's saying, my past does not define who I am in Christ.

It does not define or limit what God has planned for my future. What a wonderful, forget, let the past go, forget it, leaving it behind.

Now you may remember it and so that you are more careful to walk with Christ. You are more conscious of your ability to disobey and sin.

But for the most, you just have to let the past go. You can't change the past. None of us can change what has happened in the past. But we have something better in Christ.

[26 : 51] And it's not just for now, but it's for the future. What a wonderful thing. So those three things, remember, God is working in you. Recognize that you are on a journey and forget what lies behind and press on towards what lies ahead.

I like this passage that in Philippians is a very autobiographical passage, but I like it also in this sense.

Paul's saying, look, guys, I haven't made it yet. I'm still in process. I'm still going forward. Even me, even me, I'm the great apostle.

I've been used of God, but I haven't reached the final end of my journey just yet. Press on.

So just to try to conclude with some final thoughts. To me, what Paul's telling us is that to know Christ, is to experience Christ and to follow him.

[27 : 57] I think that in one sense, this is what biblical knowledge is all about. It's knowing God and following him. Moses in Exodus 32 and 33, 34, we have the time when the Israelites have sinned.

They've come out of Egypt. They've sinned. They've made a golden calf. God comes down and says, I'm going to destroy these people. Moses can't believe it. He comes down. He sees it. He said, he breaks the Ten Commandments, the tablets, but he also goes to God in prayer.

And he begins to intercede for these wicked people, these people that have so quickly turned aside. And he says, you know, he's praying for the Lord.

Wipe me out of your sight. If, if don't wipe them. And he goes on and on, but it comes to a point where he says to God in verse 33, 13, he says, now, therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me your ways that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight.

Consider, too, that this nation is your people. Show me your ways that I might know you. And we know then, after this, that God tells Moses, Moses, you cannot see me face to face.

[29 : 18] No one can see me face to face. You would die. But I'm going to take you, come back up on the mountain. I'm going to put you between in a, between the rocks, in a crevice.

And I'm going to pass by you, and I'm going to declare my goodness. But I'm also going to put my hand up, figuratively, and I'm going to let you see a part of my glory.

And when Moses came down from that experience, it says that his face shone. He only saw a little part of God's glory. Brothers and sisters, we've received so much more than Moses.

Now, maybe our faces aren't shining, no. But if you know Christ, you have seen and know more intimately than even he, the glory of God.

So knowing Christ is experiencing Christ. It is deep and transforming. And it leads us to a life so full and abundant that in comparison, everything else loses its charm and importance.

[30 : 38] Knowing Christ means to follow him. It means denying ourselves, yes. So my happiness is not the driving motivation of my life anymore. Taking up the cross, dying to my wants, and then doing what he commands.

Knowing Christ, and this really isn't in our text, but I'm just going to add it, it involves a community. You can't know Christ by yourself in isolation from other believers.

You can't experience it, not in its fullness. As we rub shoulders with one another, as we give and receive love, as we give and receive forgiveness, as we receive comfort and generosity and give those things back, it's just in that daily living that we're going to know Christ more deeply.

And then finally, just remember this. Your desire to know Christ can at times be very strong, and there are going to be times when it's not very strong.

It's going to be weak. I mean, you might think, well, I've lost all my zeal, but remember that he is the author of faith, and it is his grace that sustained you.

[31:54] 1 Corinthians 15, verse 10, Paul wrote this, but by the grace of God, I am who I am or what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain.

On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is in me. That is your story and my story. It's the grace of God in me.

Let us go on with our Lord Jesus Christ. Let's pray. Lord, we give you the grace, the honor, the glory, the praise. We thank you that even as we think about our future that maybe is a bit discouraging to us or we're discouraged today, we ask that you would remind us of these things.

Give us an ardent desire to know you, to follow you, to experience you, to love you. Lord, would you be gracious to this congregation, to these people, these dear saints?

Would you call people who may be hearing these words who have never trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ, would you deliver them from their bondage to sin, from their bondage to themselves, from the futility of this life without you and bring them into your glorious kingdom?

[33:18] Would you do these things for the glory of your name? We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.