

What Is Jesus Worth To You? (Philippians 3:1-11)

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This morning, as we continue our study of the Apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians, I'm going to ask you to consider what could be a very difficult and maybe uncomfortable question.

It is a question that humanity has been wrestling with since the beginning. You can sense it in the background of the story of Adam and Eve.

You can read all about how Israel struggled to answer this question throughout their wilderness wanderings, during the time of the Judges, and in each and every rise and fall of their kings and kingdoms.

And then we see it again in the New Testament, shaping the lives of Gentiles and Jews alike. Jesus himself hinted at this hard question when he challenged his followers, just as he challenges you and me today, with these words from Mark 8:36 --

For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? (Mark 8:36 ESV)

What Jesus is driving at, what the Bible repeatedly leads us to consider, what Philippians 3:1-11 will challenge us to ask ourselves today is this:

What is it that you really, truly value the most in life? (x2)

Or, more specifically: *what is the value and worth you place on knowing God and having a rich relationship with Him?* (Especially in comparison to the value and worth you place on anything and everything else)

What is the value and worth you place on knowing God and having a rich relationship with Him?

This question is not an easy one to answer. It has tremendous humbling power and demands from us an honest response. It has a reputation for reorienting lives and for changing the way we think, act, and feel.

It searches the innermost reaches of your heart and reveals whether Christ is at the center...or whether something which can only lead to loss and disappointment has been placed on the altar of your desires instead.

What is the value and worth you place on knowing God and having a rich relationship with Him?

Keep that question at the forefront of your mind as we learn from God's word together today.

If you brought your Bibles, or have your preferred Bible reading app fired up and ready to go, then I invite you to turn with me to the Book of Philippians, Chapter 3, beginning in verse 1. The verses will also appear on the screen behind me as we work our way through the passage.

Over the past few weeks we've seen that Paul's letter to the believers in the city of Philippi was one filled with warmth, admiration, and love.

The church that received this letter was one that Paul himself had helped start during his what we call his Second Missionary journey, sometime between 49 - 52 AD.

You can actually find the origin story for the Philippian church in the Book of Acts, Chapter 16. We know a little about the congregation, that it would at least included a group of fairly successful and wealthy women and, oddly enough, a jailer who had helped imprison Paul until a few miracles involving nature and grace led to the jailer and his entire family coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

Now, perhaps 10 or so years later, Paul writes to his beloved church to encourage them, to build them up, and to remind them to trust and cherish the Gospel above all things.

He also writes to warn them about the dangers of being deceived by false teachers, and in this case the false teachers appear to be a group of people known as "Judaizers."

They were Jewish Christians -- they believed that Jesus is indeed the Messiah -- but they also believed that Gentile Christians needed to adopt traditional Jewish customs and obey the Laws of Moses.

One of the most controversial things Judaizers taught was that Gentile Christians needed to take the prescribed physical steps to enter into the Abrahamic Covenant and thus become part of God's chosen people...meaning that Judaizers taught every Gentile Christian male needed to be circumcised.

As you might imagine, this turned out to be a bit of an obstacle and point of contention within the early church, especially for new adult male believers.

Part of Paul's mission during his second missionary journey was to share a decision made by the Christians gathered at something we call the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) with the churches throughout the Roman Empire.

The leaders of the early church had decided circumcision should not be required of new Gentile believers. Paul and the other early church leaders had seen the Holy Spirit fill Gentiles without adherence to the laws of the Old Covenant, which led them to determine that under the New Covenant -- under the grace, sacrifice, and resurrected life of Christ -- maintenance of one's own personal righteousness through the Law was no longer necessary.

Devotion to Jesus, who perfectly fulfills the law on our behalf, is what now unites us and defines us and makes us righteous. It's not that the Old Covenant and its laws can now be ignored or are no longer full of good ways to teach character and right conduct.

It's that the New Covenant leads us to shape our lives around our gratefulness for Jesus and what he has done and continues to do for us. We are saved by his completed work.

So, with all this in mind, in a few of his letters, Paul strongly denounces the teachings of the Judaizers for this reason: he believes they aren't preaching the Gospel of Grace, but instead the Gospel of "Grace + Something Else". Paul cannot tolerate such teachings, and he lets his readers know exactly how he feels about those who teach such things:

[1] Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.

[2] Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. [3] For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh

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Before his rather abrupt outburst against the false teachers (in v2), Paul once again reminds the Philippian Christians to “rejoice in the Lord”.

A similar command has already appeared a few times throughout Chapters 1 and 2. We’ve talked about joy in the Lord during some of the past sermons, so I won’t dwell on it too long here, but do want to make one note:

“Rejoice in the Lord” is not some passive encouragement to be superficially cheery about God. Paul doesn’t have some foolish notion that everything about following Jesus is all sunshine and roses.

Remember, Paul is likely writing this letter while sitting in a Roman prison, already on a path that will end in his eventual execution. “Rejoice in the Lord” does not mean “isn’t Jesus grand for making our lives so easy, carefree, and perfect?”

No the command Paul gives to the church is to remember that joy in this life can only be maintained if it is drawn from one’s relationship with Jesus. Not from the material blessing Jesus might give, or even the things you accomplish in His name...true and everlasting joy comes from our loving and faith-filled connection to Jesus Himself.

You cannot rejoice in anything or anyone else and expect that joy to be complete or eternal. All my fellow Kansas City Royals fans are painfully familiar with that truth this year, right? 2014 and 2015, our joy in the Royal was overflowing! But now...well, nothing on this earth lasts forever.

Which is Paul’s point -- don’t waste your time rejoicing in the things of this earth. Circumstances change and what once was good can quickly become quite bad. But this is not so with Jesus. Our Savior never stops loving us, never stops working on our behalf, never stops pouring out His grace upon our lives.

Rejoice in the Lord. As long as our joy is in Jesus it is never misplaced. We can stand against the powers and principalities that plague this world because our joy is set and secured in the victorious Jesus Christ. Things in this world may often be very hard, but take heart...Christ has overcome the world. We’ve got an eternity of victorious living to look forward to.

In the meantime...Paul warns the Christians of Philippi that they need to be careful about who they listen to, learn from, and what they choose to believe. The sad and heartbreaking truth is that not everyone who shares the Gospel does so in a healthy or theologically responsible way.

Sometimes the temptation to insert ourselves and make our works and deeds part of our salvation is just too great. We like the false sense of security that comes with seeing the Gospel as something Jesus did PLUS the things we do (because we like to think and feel that we’ve contributed, that we’ve done something, that at least part of our salvation is under our control)...but Paul has no patience for such things.

He warns his readers -- “Look out, look out, look out!” Be on your guard against anyone who teaches that faith in Jesus Christ is achieved by your belief in the Gospel PLUS your own additional works.

He calls such teachers “dogs” and “evildoers”, and accuses them of mutilating the flesh. This is very shocking and perhaps disturbingly harsh language. There is a bunch of history and cultural significance behind each of these terms, but if you’ll allow me a simple summary so we can get on with the awesome and potentially uplifting parts of this

passage, then I will just say this: each of these terms (dogs, evildoers, mutilators of the flesh) were used by some Jews and at times some Jewish-Christians to describe any non-Jewish people they believed to be outside the people of God.

Paul turns each of these terms back on the Judaizers (Jewish-Christians) in order to add to the shock-value of what he's saying: although they thought they were doing right by urging Gentile believers to keep the Mosaic Law, to become part of the Old Covenant community through the religious rite of circumcision, in reality they were holding onto something not required in the New Covenant Community and heaping unreasonable, unhelpful, grace-killing extras onto the Gentile followers of Christ.

While it is probably unfair to assume a malicious intent from the Judaizers, they nonetheless are engaged in evil activity by way of assumed (false) superiority, poor theology, and adding things to the Gospel that should not be added.

Paul's point is this: we must never add anything to the Gospel. We must never think we can add or accept any extra qualifiers, additional works, or personal achievements to what Jesus has done for us.

We don't really deal with the specific problem of circumcision being a litmus test for true faith in our culture. But that doesn't mean we don't struggle with the belief that faith in Jesus is "the Gospel + something we do." Something we do that helps us earn God's favor.

Think for a moment, what are some of the things you've been told you must add to your faith, or even some things you must confess you've told others add to their faith, to really be a part of God's people? To really be a part of the church?

- A certain political view or a particular voting record?
- Allegiance to a particular denomination you feel is the "right" one?
- A theological distinctive that defines more of your understanding of faith than Jesus himself?
- Having the right kind of friends, the right kind of children, the right kind of job, or being involved in the right kind of ministry? Dressing the right sort of way, reading the right sort of things during your right-kind of devotional time during the week?
- One that is a stumbling block that I must watch out for, and perhaps some of you must take care to avoid as well: attaching a particular social justice concern to the quality of your own or someone else's faith.

All of these things can be good, and they can be engaged through our faith in Christ. But to give them a place in our hearts alongside the Gospel, and to preach them in the same breath as the life, death, and resurrection of our Savior...that's when they become the Gospel +, and that's when we get it wrong.

Friends, we MUST not go down this dangerous and destructive road. We need to check ourselves and make sure we're not believing or preaching a Gospel of personal achievement or works-based salvation.

But how do we do this? How do we make sure our faith is in Jesus alone and not in ourselves?

Paul gives us the mindset we must have in v. 3:

[3] For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh

Philippians 3

This is an amazing sentence, especially when you consider in light of the overall biblical story.

Paul is saying that the people of God -- who at one point were designated by their adherence to the Law and compliance with commands such as circumcision- are now identified by our worship of God, made possible by the indwelling Holy Spirit, through our faith in Jesus Christ who truly deserves the credit for our salvation and our every confidence. (x2?)

We have done nothing to earn this blessing; it is all a gracious gift of the Lord. In other words,

Everything about our relationship with God is a product of the Grace of God.

We worship Him by the power of His Spirit and give glory to Christ His Son who has saved us by calling us to faith in Himself.

Everything about our relationship with God is a product (gift) of the Grace of God.

If that does not drive you to your knees in thankfulness then check your heart: you're probably still harboring some belief that you've done something to win God's favor, that God owes you your salvation.

He does not. We cannot add anything to our lives that makes saving us more "worth it" to God. To believe we can is to have "confidence in the flesh", which is precisely what Paul warns us against.

There is no "Gospel + something you do/add" that makes you a better candidate for salvation. **Everything about our relationship with God is a product of the Grace of God**, and it would be a fantastic use of your personal devotional time or life group's time to dwell on exactly what that Grace has meant to you and done for you in your life.

In my life, God's grace has helped me understand that it's okay not to be perfect not to please everyone, and not feel as I am failing if I do not meet every need that comes my way. Also, that it is okay to fail! I am imperfect and I am going to fail from time to time, but God will never fail and ultimately all things are under His control.

It's led me to desire and pursue a meaningful and personal relationship with my Creator and Savior. It's given me the humility to admit I struggle with anxiety. It's given me the courage to tell others that yes, I believe in Jesus, and I hope and pray they do too.

By God's grace I can understand that I must have the same sort of patience and forgiveness with others that He has had with me.

By the grace of God I can understand that I have sinned, be broken by the reality of my rebelling, and be reborn by the power of Christ's love and the Holy Spirit living in me.

My hope is that this week you would take the time to truly consider what it means for you that **everything about your relationship with God is a product, a gift, of the Grace of God**. And that you would be led to pray thankfully to God, to worship Him more gladly, and to treasure your relationship with Him more precious than ever before.

This is the sort of truth that changes everything about our lives. Destroys the old to make way for the new. That is exactly what Paul says it did in his own life. It redefined his categories of worth, value, and righteousness. The Grace of God completely upended Paul's entire world...and his message to the Philippians, and to us, is that the Gospel of Grace is worth suffering some loss in this life in order to gain more and more of Jesus.

At the end of verse 3 Paul wrote that we must “*put no confidence in the flesh*”. He then goes on to use his own life as a sort of case study as to why believing in ourselves, our achievements, our hard work -- even when that work is good -- is simply not enough when it comes to matters of righteousness before God and salvation from sin.

Paul had learned to toss aside all confidence in himself, which was no small thing. He’d worked hard during his life, and says as much in v. 4:

[4] ...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: [5] circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; [6] as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

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Paul is basically saying here, “Look, I was kind of a big deal among my Jewish friends and Pharisee colleagues. I had power, privilege, prestige, authority, acclaim, and notoriety. I had every advantage to succeed, and I made use of all those advantages to make a name and a reputation for myself that demanded respect.”

Paul had everything he could want as a brilliant, genius, high-status Jewish professional.

And then he met Jesus on the road to Damascus and his entire perspective on what really matters and who God really is was transformed forever.

[7] But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. [8] 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

Philippians 3

Paul met Jesus, confessed Jesus as the Son of God and the Savior he’d been waiting for...and his whole life changed. He came to the realization that righteousness and salvation could not be produced by his privilege, pedigree, power, achievements, reputation, or even his hard work. It was all worthless -- rubbish, trash, garbage -- compared to being in the presence of Christ.

So again, we return to our questions for the day:

What is it that you really, truly value the most in life?

What is the value and worth you place on knowing God and having a rich relationship with Him?

In my opinion, v. 8 is one of the most profound, humbling, and challenging ideas in all of Scripture.

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

To think about and count all that I have gained in my life, and then move those gains into the loss side of my mental ledger so that I can make room for Christ to be the only true gain in my head and my heart...y’all I don’t know about you, but for me that is hard.

I spend most of my days enjoying the worth and benefits of the things I've gained. My education, career, family, and friends. The privilege of my reasonably secure and safe life in the United States. The money I have, the health I enjoy, even the silly little things like my dog, my enjoyment of sports, or the ridiculous number of books that I own. My list of gains goes on and on and on.

So it is no small thing to move all this blessing aside and keep Christ as the center of my life as the supreme worthy gain of my heart.

What is it that you need to move aside? What do you need to hold with open hands and open arms, or to let fall away entirely, so that like Paul you too can say, "*I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*"?

I can't create your list for you. But I can urge you to make Christ the honest answer to the question, "*What is it that you really, truly value the most in life?*"

A silly little illustration that helps me think about this question is in your bulletin, and might be a helpful tool for you this week as you think about the surpassing worth of Jesus Christ in your own life.

If you had a compass that always led you to the desire of your heart...how often would "North" point you to Jesus?

I will freely confess to you all: my answer is "not nearly often enough." Don't get me wrong, I know I love Jesus. But not always to the extent that I can look at the other good gains of my life and see them as rubbish compared to my Savior.

I want to stand with Jesus, but some days I want to stand with him with my arms full of diplomas and paychecks and records of my life's work and achievements.

But arms full of the things of this world make it awfully hard to fully embrace Jesus. Not only that, but all that stuff I think I need to carry around, in the end, can't do anything to save me.

That's Paul's point in the final verses of our passage today. Paul said that, "*For [Christ's] sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ...*"

[9] 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—[10] that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, [11] that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Philippians 3

Faith in Jesus Christ -- that ultimate and priceless gift given out of the grace-filled heart of our Holy God -- leads us into the righteous life we so desperately want and need but cannot achieve on our own.

Interestingly, Paul confesses that he doesn't know what the future holds or how exactly he'll one day be fully united with Jesus.

When he says he plans to attain the resurrection from the dead "by any means possible", he saying he can't be sure what lies ahead: perhaps Jesus will return. Perhaps he'll live another 40 years then die in his sleep. As it turned out, he

would be executed not too long after writing this letter. His life was full of hardship and suffering. Following Jesus cost him everything he'd worked hard for and gained in this life. He lost it all...

...and yet gained everything he really truly needed by valuing Jesus above all things and knowing the incomparable, irreplaceable worth of a rich relationship with Him.

What is it that you really, truly value the most in life?

What is the value and worth you place on knowing God and having a rich relationship with Him?

May we all humble ourselves to seek Jesus more fully each and every day, so that we too can say with confidence,

"I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."