

## **Week 6 (Oct 15–21): Choose Joy by Knowing Jesus! Philippians 3:1–11**

It is always frustrating to fail when trying your best. The result can be a deep sense of defeat and can lead to a variety of depressing emotions. Sometimes the Christian life can be frustrating because in all of our trying, we seem to never get better or we continue to fail and fail over and over again. Maybe we pray, “God forgive me, I won’t do that again.” But then we end up in the same place over and over again. Why is that?

Philippians 3:1–11 helps us understand not only why this is a pattern in our lives but also how we can move from being defeated by our inability to resting in Christ’s ability by knowing Him. First, why do we fail?

### **Your Best Is NOT ENOUGH**

#### **Philippians 3:1–6**

*Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.<sup>2</sup> Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh.<sup>3</sup> For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—<sup>4</sup> though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more:<sup>5</sup> circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee;<sup>6</sup> as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.*

Paul warns the people that there are folks who are teaching them wrong teaching and a different gospel. They were proclaiming a gospel of required external rites and actions in order to be saved. In the Old Testament, circumcision was a sign and mark that you were a part of the people of God (Gn 17:9–11), namely that Israel would be holy and represent God well. Circumcision was never designed to save the individual, but God’s people have always been saved by faith that God was going to bring about His plan of redemption and salvation for His people (see Romans 4:3). Instead, circumcision was always intended to be a sign of devotion for the people of God.

When Jesus came, He established a new order through a new covenant. He fulfilled all of the Law that came before (Jeremiah 31:31–34; Matthew 5:17–20) and He declared, “Believe in me and you will be saved!” Paul is saying that Jesus changes things. Physical circumcision is no longer a sign of devotion to

God because through Jesus, we gain a “circumcision of the heart” (Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4) so that we are able to fully obey and follow the Lord and His ways. This is why Paul says “we are the circumcision” (Philippians 3:3).

But some among them were telling them they needed physical circumcision again. So, what does Paul do? He reminds them that if acts on the flesh could save them then they could have been saved apart from Christ! Furthermore, he reminds them that if anyone could have placed their confidence in the flesh, it was him. Paul was a super-star Israelite. He was the best Jew anyone could have been. But then he declares, “But my best was never good enough to save me.” No matter how hard he tried, he still fell short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Our best efforts and trying will always fall short. If we’re not careful, our dependence on our abilities will leave us to a life of frustration, not joy. What should we do about our inability?

### **Know Christ’s RIGHTEOUSNESS**

#### **Philippians 3:7–9**

*But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.*

Paul declares that everything he thought was saving him and bringing him closer to the Lord was a loss compared to Jesus. What he thought to be gain was actually a hinderance to the relationship with the Lord that he desired most.

But Paul goes further. Not only was all of his good working a loss, he calls it *skubalon* (refuse, rubbish, trash, garbage, dung!). This is a seemingly harsh word in a world that claims there are “good people” apart from Christ’s work. But even our best is trash compared to the work of King Jesus. There is nothing we can do to save ourselves. There is nothing we can do to earn forgiveness. There is nothing we can do to be fulfilled and satisfied. There is nothing we can do to clean ourselves up.

But once we recognize this reality, we are called to know Christ’s righteousness. Righteousness is to be seen right before God. The work has been done through Jesus. Gaining Christ is recognizing that we need to gain His righteousness. The only way we do this is by believing that He is the Savior

who wishes to clothe us with His righteousness so that we can have a right relationship with God again!

If we desire to be seen right before the Lord, we have to quit trying to weigh our good works versus your bad works because even our best doesn't measure up. Instead, get to know Christ's righteousness, be found in Him, and let Him change your identity. In Christ our identity is no longer found in what we are able to do or what we bring to the table, but in what Christ has done.

### **Know Christ's WORK**

#### **Philippians 3:10**

*I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death...*

Knowing Christ's righteousness should not cause complacency but should be our motivation for a present kind of gospel laboring in our daily lives. Our works and obedience can't save us, but a life of obedience is worship. The Christian life is a life that rests in the finished work of Jesus and works itself out in fear and trembling by pursuing holiness (remember the previous session!). Paul is saying by imitating Christ in sufferings and death, He is our model for a life dedicated to the spread of the gospel. When we understand this world is not our home, then we understand that present sufferings in Jesus' name are *skubalon* compared to the surpassing value of knowing Jesus.

Remember, Paul is in prison. Identity in Christ results in imitating and reflecting Christ. In this way our knowledge of Christ takes on a present reality for us. His work causes us to know Him and join Him as a co-laborer. In other words, the more we know Jesus, the more we are able to do what He has called us to do.

### **Know Christ's RETURN**

#### **Philippians 3:11**

*...And so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.*

Paul's longing to know Christ was ultimately a longing to be like Christ in His glorified and resurrected state. The "somehow" statement is not that Paul is uncertain of his future hope, but more flabbergasted by it! How is it that, somehow, we might also share in His future glorified state, even though we know our best is like trash?

The glorious part of knowing Christ is we can rest in the assurance that we will be resurrected with Him (see 1 Corinthians 15). Jesus's resurrection is the first-fruits of our resurrection and guarantees the resurrection and renewal of all things in the age to come. And the Scriptures are clear: Those who know Jesus in this life will be resurrected with Jesus in the next one.

The glorious hope of the Christian life is that we will one day come face to face with our God. We must thank the Lord that on that day, we will not face Him in our own abilities and strength because our best will never be good enough in light of His holiness. Rather, we praise God through our Lord Jesus Christ that we will face Him clothed in Jesus's righteousness.

This passage reminds us that we are called to know Christ's work in a past, present and future kind of way: knowing His righteousness (past), co-laboring with Him (present), and the glorious hope we have in Him (future)!

### **Discussion Questions:**

- Be honest with yourself: Does the phrase "your best is not good enough" cause frustration, depression or relief? Why?
- Do you live as though your salvation is dependent upon your actions?
- Why was Paul so against the practice of circumcision for Christians?
- What are some modern day "external rites" Christians add to the gospel? How do these misrepresent the actual gospel?
- Paul treasured Christ more than anything else in his life. What often gets in the way of your passion for knowing and following Jesus?
- How does the importance that Paul placed on his relationship with Christ relate to the joy that he possessed? What can we learn from that?
- Do you struggle to know Christ's power more in a past, present or future kind of way?