

Knowing Christ

One of the keynotes of Paul's letter is rejoicing in the Lord we see it there in vs 1

Philippians 3:1 *Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord!*

And again twice in 4:4

Philippians 4:4 *⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!*

But by the end of this passage he is talking again about suffering in the midst of the context of knowing Christ. How can he get from rejoicing to suffering are they not two completely different things?

Anyone who has lived any length of time knows that life has it's up and down – whether it's being shunned in the playground at school, serious illness in the family or personal struggles with depression or stress. At some point we all experience the gritty realities of life in the 21st century. If the Christian faith is worth its salt it will have something substantial to say in every facet of life. Biblical Christianity is not full of glib platitudes, plastic smiles and mindless sentimentality but genuine hope for life in all its variances.

We all want to be happy and there is nothing wrong with that but so often we settle for the quick fixes or fickle solutions and so when trouble or strife comes along the quick fix breaks down and we are left desolate. But the rejoicing and joy that Paul found withstood the rigors of life up against it in the first century. It stemmed from a deep inner condition of delight in God and his goodness. The anchor of his life was not resting on the alluring but unsubstantial sands of life but in the rock of ages – sure to hold through the fiercest storm. Does Now here is something for us all this morning.

Paul is not making it up. Jesus express desire for his own is written for us in John 17:13 and John heard it from the lips of the man himself, Jesus prayed "... *that they may have the full measure of my joy within them.*" In other words that they may be able to rejoice in me – always.

But can we really know it? Is it really real or just a vague hope? Well I think Paul tells us how gain this knowledge of Christ that brings joy. The first thing is to avoid dead religion vs 1- 6 and the second is to gaining living faith vs 7-11.

Avoid dead religion v1-6
Gain living faith v7-11

Avoid dead religion v1-6

Philippians 3:1 *Finally, my brothers,*

Paul the typical preacher starts to finish but manages to keep going for quite a while and has another finally in verse 8 of chapter 4!

But he obviously wants to finish on this note of rejoicing in all circumstances - knowing the full measure of Christ's joy.

Philippians 3:1 rejoice in the Lord!

Paul is not stating it as an optional extra for the Christian but it comes to us as a command! Never mind thinking O yes that's something I must do – just do it! Wake up first thing in the morning with thanksgiving on our lips and the desire in our hearts to live in his will for you that day.

Philippians 3:1 *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.*

What does he mean here?

Basically Paul is saying stick close to Christ, know his joy and you will not wonder off – Christ the focal point of life, Christ the mainstay in life, Christ likeness the way and establishing Christ's kingdom the end. It's full on isn't it?

Do you sometimes feel you do not get much from our faith? Is it because we you not really live it? Now there is something for all of us to think about!

The safeguard from falling into error is keeping Christ central to our faith. He explains what the particular thing he is safeguarding against is in vs 2

Philippians 3:2 ² *Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh.*

This is pretty strong stuff from Paul. Who are they?

Notice the reference in verse 3 to circumcision – that done to male born Jews at the age of 8 days. Because Christianity rose out of Judaism big questions arose from Jewish converts about the place of the old testament laws. They insisted that non-Jewish converts should be circumcised. Those who insisted on this became known as the circumcision group. And hence the reason for the term mutilators of the flesh. The term dogs was how Jews in those days referred to non Jews and so Paul (a Jew by birth) turns it back on them.

Now obviously we do not have this problem any more but as we will see in a minute I think that the deadness of their religiosity still exists today.

If I can be a bit explicit for a minute – the symbolism of the circumcision was and is the shedding off of a

life not committed to the will and way of God and to being set apart for him.

But when we become Christians Paul in Romans 2:29, 2 Corinthians 5:17 tells us that our hearts are changed by the work of the Spirit. The old way of living has gone and the new has come and we are set apart to live for God – circumcision of the heart performed by God's Spirit.

Philippians 3:3 ³ *For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh (works or legalistic code)*

Paul used the well known symbols of his time and culture to explain the work of God.

Paul was so upset by them because at the end of the day this group as well as dividing congregations were saying that in addition to **faith** in Christ you had to add works to be sure that you got to heaven.

Completely contradicting the message of Christ that we are saved by faith for good works not saved by faith and good works. Introduces deadening effect of a works based religion and not a faith based living relationship with the triune God.

Paul himself had been down that road. He gives a personal testimony

Philippians 3:4-7 *If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put 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; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. ⁷ But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.*

He had all the credentials both inherited and achieved. He was a pure blood Jew, of Jewish parents, circumcised at 8 days, an Israelite and of the tribe of Benjamin who alone stood up with Judah during the civil war and for the true worship of God.

To boot he was of a select group of strict adherents to the letter of the law. He even persecuted the church and held the coats of others as they stoned Christians to death. This guy would have won the Pharisee of the year award every year without competition. He would have been a scary bloke!

⁷ *But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.*

Paul deliberately uses the language of accountancy. He thought he was a spiritual millionaire but Jesus pointed out as far as he was concerned Paul was spiritually bankrupt.

Murdo, my brother, is seven years older than me. Once he sent me down to the local shop to buy sweets for him and his chums with monopoly money. I of course was very small and thought I was loaded. Only to be disappointed and somewhat red faced when confronted with the truth that what I thought was more than adequate was less than adequate!

When Paul met Jesus on the Damascus road he was disappointed, why? Paul was trying to work his way to heaven but the devastating bottom line is you have to be perfect to get into God's perfect heaven. What he was holding onto was less than adequate

Matt 5:48 Jesus said, "*Be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect.*"

The word Paul uses for this kind of perfection is righteousness. The thing with righteousness or perfection is that it is meaningless if you try to divide it. Either it is perfect or righteous or it is not.

All round the world today – in the Christian church and outside it there are those who think they are spiritual millionaires. The death of Christ is alright but really you need to live a good life to get to heaven – I call that dead religion because at the end of the day it is about self achievement and self reliance and you can get there without God. What do you think? Faith in Christ plus good works – like going to church, member of the church of Scotland, my father in law is

a minister, doing your good deed for the day, wearing a rangers or celtic top, being born in a 'Christian' country – I've heard them all and they are part of dead religion. Or rather faith in Christ for good works that will proclaim the goodness of the God of heaven.

Actually even when we understand this idea of faith alone we can still develop our own little righteousness code – if I read my bible every day, pray most days, witness once a week, go to church twice on a Sunday I am more acceptable to God. No we do these things because they are helpful to our spiritual life – they do not make us more acceptable to God though they may make us more usable by God!

Here is another issues Paul raises - some folks say all religions lead to God but Paul presents us with a problem. Why did he need to change his faith? When did God convert him to Christianity?

Actually Paul was not swapping religion but entering a relationship – won over by a Person – Christ. When we are have been won over by God he looks at our spiritual bankruptcy and credits the righteousness of Christ to our overdrawn account

That is the difference between self or legalistic righteousness (vs 6) and the righteousness that God credits us with – imputed righteousness. We are, as it were, credited with the perfect righteousness of

Christ. Done with dead legal work based religions to gain living faith.

Gain living faith

Hence Paul says

Philippians 3:8-9 ⁸ *What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, 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 is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.*

The verses subsequent to these are surprising

Philippians 3:10-11 ¹⁰ *I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

The first few notions are great. He is concerned not just to know about Christ but actually know him. Imagine that – actually knowing Christ. Don't you ever wonder what it was like to walk and talk with Jesus just like the disciples, to know what he was really like? Paul is saying you and I can know Christ

– do you want to know him? Do you think it is really possible? It is. We can by putting our trust in him. Like the bride with the bridegroom she forsakes all others to gain this one man. So to the Christian forsakes all other idols, gods, demi gods, ideologies, incompatible lifestyles and attitudes.

Having entered into the marriage the bride radiates with love and is empowered and ennobled. Paul calls that the power of his resurrection which is the enabling of the Holy Spirit to live out the Christian life – being the bride of Christ. We need that enabling to live out the faith in a world often antithetical to the gospel.

But Paul also wants to know the fellowship of sharing in his Christ's suffering. Paul is not some masochist who enjoys pain. He knows from personal experience that when you put your head above the parapet and stand up for the gospel and for truth you, like Jesus, will at times have to endure antagonism.

The idea of becoming like him in his death echoes that. But after sharing the fact of Christ and his kingdom there is also a glorious hope – resurrection.

You know we wonder what was there before the universe. What was there before the big bang, where did all the matter for the universe come from? But we do not often consider what will there be at the end. Where will all the matter go? If God is at the

beginning then surely he will be at the end also. He who begun it all will end it all and remake it all. And his promise is, just like Jesus we will rise again to see it when we live and die with, in and for him.

Rejoice in the Lord – avoid dead religion and gain a living faith and know his power for those who believe for life and for living.