

A Joy-filled Experience of Christ
Philippians 3:1-11
Sunday, April 28th, 2019
By Ryan Perry

Scripture:

Philippians 3:1–11:

[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—[4] 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 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. [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 [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.

Let's Pray

Introduction

As you have probably already seen on the opening slide the title of this sermon is “**A Joy-filled Experience of Christ.**”

Now the word “**experience**” can be hard for some because it brings to mind this image of a faith that is based upon emotion verses the word of God.

For others you love it because you crave those times where you feel emotionally connected to God.

From my perspective, I don't think either of those are bad. We don't want a faith based solely on emotional experience, but we also don't want a faith devoid of an emotional connection with Christ.

But instead of talking about a mere emotional experience, I have chosen to use the word “**experience**” to help give life to the main purpose of this text which is found in verses 10.

As Paul writes:

“[10] that I may know him...”

So, everything that Paul says in this section of scripture is motivated by and culminates in his desire to **know Christ**.

This is a knowing that is more than intellectual and is more than mere emotion. The Greek word **ginosko** (know) in this context points to an intimate knowledge or experience of Christ. This is the kind of experience that happens in a close relationship that one might have with a brother, sister, friend, or even a spouse.

It's close, personal, and intimate. And according to Paul's command in verse 1 it is Joy-filled.

[1] Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.

So, I give you all of that not to merely defend the title of my sermon. More importantly, I am telling you this to show you that everything that I will say in this sermon, and everything that Paul says to the Philippian church in these verses is pointing us and them toward a **joy-filled, intimate, and relational, experience of Christ**.

And more than that, Paul is also giving us three big points that serve as our road map for how to get there. They are as follows:

- 1. A Joy-filled experience of Christ begins with boasting in Christ, not ourselves. (V. 1-3)**
- 2. A Joy-filled experience of Christ requires us to live as if our works are rubbish. (V. 3-9)**
- 3. A Joy-filled experience of Christ requires us to become like Christ. (V. 10-11)**

All of this is before us today so that we would see that an all-satisfying relationship with, and experience of Christ, is better than anything else we would try to create on our own.

And it's also before us to answer the all-important question, **“how do we get there?”**

Let's begin this morning by looking at our first point.

- 1. A Joy-filled experience of Christ begins with boasting in Christ, not ourselves. (V. 1-3)**

Paul writes:

[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—

Paul opens this section of scripture with the resounding call to rejoice. This call, which is prevalent throughout this letter, is so important that he bookends this section of scripture with the same command.

Philippians 4:4:

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.

But why is this call to rejoice or have joy so important to Paul, particularly in this letter, and in this section of scripture?

Because there were those who wanted to **steal the joy of the Philippians** by getting them to trust in themselves instead of Christ.

In verse 2 Paul calls these people the dogs, evildoers, and mutilators of the flesh.

This was a group of supposed Jewish Christians (Judaizers) who had been going to different gentile churches trying to convince them that they needed to conform to Jewish customs and practices to be saved.

This is the same group that Paul writes about in Galatians 6:12-13 when he says:

12 It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. 13 For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh.

They were trying to make the gospel, **Jesus plus works**. And the specific thing that they were making necessary for salvation was circumcision. This is why Paul writes in verse 3 of Philippians 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—

According to Paul, the Judaizers (the dogs, evildoers, and mutilators of the flesh) who would try to make circumcision, or any human work of the flesh, part of the gospel, are boasting or putting their confidence in themselves and not in Christ.

They are not Christians, they have no hope of the resurrection, and their works will not give them the joy-filled experience of Christ that Paul so badly wants for himself and the Philippians.

That type of life, relationship, and experience are only reserved for those who glory or boast in Christ. This means that their full hope and confidence in all things is not based on what they do but on Jesus Christ and his finished work on the cross.

I feel like this is especially an important warning for us as Americans isn't it. We are told by popular culture all the time that we create our own happiness, that we create our own purpose, and that we are the masters of our destiny.

On top of that we have companies endlessly telling us that we need their products to survive and be happy. **Take Dunkin' Donuts for example. Their slogan is:**

America Runs on Dunkin'

Now besides the obvious fact that Dunkin' Donuts has terrible coffee, they are trying to get us to see their company, their brand, and their products as an integral and necessary part of our existence and happiness.

They want us to boast in **Dunkin' Donuts** and not in Christ.

That might seem like a silly example to you, but you need to understand that we are being confronted with lies like this every day.

We are tempted to boast in our social status, our monetary standing, our job performance, our parental performance, our church attendance, our charitable endeavors, etc...

And we are daily tempted by the pervasive lie around us that something other than Jesus will bring satisfaction and security, will give us a close standing with God, and therefore are integral parts of our existence and happiness.

But Paul tell us not to put confidence in those things. They cannot give us eternal life, **and they cannot give us what we so badly desire which is to know and be accepted by Christ in an intimate and joy-filled way.**

According to Paul, that is only possible when we begin to put our full confidence and hope, for this life and the next in Christ alone. We must boast in Christ alone.

2. A Joy-filled experience of Christ requires us to live as if our works are rubbish. (V. 3-9)

Now, most of us are probably thinking, **“yep, Paul's right. If we want to joyfully experience Christ we need to boast in Christ and not in ourselves, enough said, and we can all go home now.”**

But Paul knows that we need more than that. He knew that the Judaizers would probably come to the Philippians and say something like, **“Well Paul must have left his Jewish ways because he wasn't a very good Jew in the first place. If Paul was only better at following the rules (the Jewish ceremonial Laws) he would be accepted by God through Christ just like us.”**

And the Philippians could have been swayed into thinking, **“Your right, Paul is a religious failure. Teach us how to do the right things so we can be in a right relationship with Jesus.”**

They would have been led astray into putting their hope in their works and not in Christ.

Paul, however, shuts that possibility down, slams that door, and puts the proverbial nail in the coffin.

He writes in verse 3-4:

...put no confidence in the flesh—[4] 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 more:

“Oh, and by the way Philippians, if those Judaizers try to tell you their form of obedience was and is better than mine, let me tell you, they’re wrong, and I’m going to tell you why they’re wrong”

Paul then gives his personal testimony of his Judaism in verses 5-6.

[5] circumcised on the eighth day (according to the law), *of the people of Israel* (Paul was a natural born citizen of Israel, not a convert), *of the tribe of Benjamin* (he was a part of one of the distinguished tribes), *a Hebrew of Hebrews* (Paul was pure Hebrew through and through); *as to the law, a Pharisee* (He was a part of the most radical Jewish sect, and he even says in Galatians 1:14 that he was advancing beyond most of his contemporaries);

[6] as to zeal, a persecutor of the church (He was so zealous about his Judaism and the Law that he was persecuting the church to get rid of it); *as to righteousness under the law, blameless* (Paul kept all of the rituals and ceremonial laws in such a way that no one could accuse him of failing.)

This is like Paul’s, Muhammad Ali moment, when he says, **“I am the greatest.”**

So, what is Paul’s point?

If there is anyone out there, Judaizer or not, who thinks they can somehow keep the law better than Paul, or if anyone thinks they can gain a right standing and relationship with God based on their works, they’re wrong.

Paul did all of the Jewish ceremonies, and kept all of the Jewish laws better than anyone else in his day, and in the end he calls all of those works rubbish...**literally poop.**

He goes on to write in verses 7-9:

[7] But whatever gain (profits) I had (in keeping religious rituals), I counted as loss (As nothing or worthless) for the sake of Christ.

[8] Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing (intimately experiencing a relationship with) Christ Jesus my Lord.

For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things (Paul has suffered the loss of his status as a Pharisee, the loss of his place in Judaism because he was rejected by the Jews, the loss of his money, the loss of his freedom because he is in jail, the loss of a comfortable life, you name it. He has suffered the loss of everything we might otherwise count as gain and advantage in this life) and count them as rubbish (Paul sees all of the former things that he worked hard to achieve in Judaism as worthless, waste, refuse, and without value),

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—

Paul gave everything of his former life up (money, religious status, heritage, works of the law, etc...) and sees them as worthless garbage so that he could gain Christ.

That he would be united with Christ, through faith, in such a way that he would have a right standing with Christ, a new life with Christ, an intimate fellowship with Christ, and an everlasting joy in Christ, that has nothing to do with his human works or achievement but is fully dependent upon the finished work of Christ, alone.

This is Paul's way of hitting us over the head with the reality that our achievements cannot save us, they cannot make us right with God, nor can they give us they intimate joy-filled experience of Christ that we so badly want and need.

And if we want to be like Paul, and know Christ in this way, then we need to not only stop boasting in our achievements, but we need to daily peel away the layers of our pride and self-righteousness that cause us to live as if our works and achievements somehow make us right with God.

We need to stop living as Pharisee's. (Pause)

Now, you might be tempted to ask, "Pastor Ryan, are you calling me a Pharisee?" Maybe. I know I can be one.

You see, a Pharisee is someone who works hard to do a lot of external things to proof that they are righteous or right with God.

1. You might be tempted every Sunday to take pride in the fact that you are here every Sunday.
2. Maybe you feel super spiritual because you think you have the right theology and have read the right books or listened to the right podcasts.
3. Maybe your someone who feels morally superior because you always doing the right thing.
4. Maybe your someone who loves to talk about your freedom in Christ when maybe your using it as license to sin, instead of using it to serve others as Paul writes in Gal. 5:13.
5. Maybe you think your politics are better than other Christians.
6. Maybe you have an arrogance about your talents and how much the world and church needs you.

All of these are things Pharisee's do and think, and I know that I have been each one of these at different points in my life.

And when we think and live like a Pharisee we either knowingly or unknowingly let our works become the bench mark of our relationship with Christ.

So how do we stop being a Pharisee?

It starts with the daily reminder that you need Christ and can't save yourself.

As Ephesians 2:8-9 says:

[8] For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Second, we must daily see and confess our desires to act like a Pharisee.

1 John 1:9 says:

[9] If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

We must be willing to do the hard-daily work of protecting our minds and hearts. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 10:5:

[5] "...take every thought captive to obey Christ,"

All of this culminates in the need to daily remind ourselves that all of our self-righteous works and thoughts are rubbish and waste.

If we don't do this, our closeness or rightness with God will always be based upon what we are doing and how we are doing.

And in the end, we will not experience a real daily joy-filled intimacy and fellowship with Christ.

We will have lifeless and joyless religion that has a list of to-do's that, if properly done, will somehow make us right with God.

Don't settle for this. Stop being a Pharisee, and let's daily count our works as loss.

3. A Joy-filled experience of Christ requires us to become like Christ. (V. 10-11)

[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.

Paul so far has laid a great foundation for us on how we can have a **joy-filled, intimate, and relational, experience of Christ.**

We begin by boasting in Christ alone, and putting all of our confidence and hope in him. Second, we daily must count all of our works, past, present, and future, as rubbish. **They are unable to save us, are unable to make us right with God, and they count for nothing.**

But the last point that Paul gives us, and probably the hardest, is the call to become like Christ.

Paul finally gets to the heart of the matter in verse 10. He wants to boast in Christ alone and count his works as rubbish so that he may intimately know and fellowship with Christ. **This part of verse 10 is the crux and culmination of all that Paul has said.**

But we can't rightly understand what Paul means by knowing Christ apart from the rest of verse 10. Paul, according to verse 10, connects knowing Christ intimately with experiencing the power of his resurrection and sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.

Well what does that mean?

For the answer let's look earlier in this letter at Philippians 2:5-8:

[5] Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. [8] And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. [9] Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, [10] so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus willingly become a servant, he humbled himself, and gave his life on the cross, and was exalted (resurrected) so that we as his people would worship him, and our God and Father would be glorified.

In the same way, Paul is telling us in verse 10 of Philippians 3 that knowing Christ in a joy-filled and intimate way requires us to live the same way.

We as believers are to be selfless servants who pour out our days and moments for Christ in such a way that we would suffer for him and be conformed his likeness (death).

Now I don't have time to spell out all the implications of that, but I do want to let you know that this is exactly what Jesus said in Luke 9:23:

[23] And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."

"But Pastor Ryan isn't this the same as law-keeping, salvation earning, self-righteousness?"

No. This is a Holy Spirit wrought love for Christ that gives up all of our rule keeping and salvation earning ways in order to be poured out by Christ and for Christ so that his kingdom would be build, and our great God and Father would be glorified.

This takes us from lifeless rule keeping, to joy-filled, life giving sacrifice.

Conclusion:

This is how we know Christ and experience intimate fellowship with him. We put all our confidence in him and count all of our works and law keeping as rubbish.

And then and only then, we will we be able to freely experience the power, joy, and fellowship with Christ, as we give ourselves over to him and his purposes, denying ourselves daily, sharing in his sufferings, and becoming like him in his death knowing that what awaits us according to verse 11 is the resurrection from the death.

And I will leave you with this. If this feels heavy, weighty, and hard, I want you to know that Paul has good news for each one of us that will help us to press on and run hard after this daily experience of Christ. **But for more on that you will have to come back next week.**

Let's pray.