

The Path of True Joy: Part 2
The Surpassing Worth of Knowing Christ
Sunday, March 2nd, 2025
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

How many of you have ever written a resume?

I have written several different types of resumes over the years, and one of the things that I hate about them is the fact that you are always trying to sell yourself. You have to put down all of your qualifications, achievements, and associations in a way that will make you look better than all the other applicants.

Because if you have ever applied for a job, you know how important it is to make a good impression, so that you can get the interview, and finally land the job.

In our text for this morning, we are getting an up-close look at the apostle Paul's resume. But he's not using it to prove his worth, to make a good impression, or to get a job.

In fact, he is doing the opposite. He is using his resume to expose even further the false teachings of the Judaizers and to show the Philippians that no one's heritage or works can ever make them right with God.

Instead, he wants them to see that real joy and everlasting life are only found when we understand and experience “the surpassing value of knowing Christ.”

So this morning we will be unpacking Paul's resume and really, the rest of his argument against these false teachers in Philippians 3:4-11.

As we do that, we will encounter three main ideas that will help us to experience the true and lasting value of Christ that he's talking about. Those ideas being:

The allure of human achievements, the surpassing worth of Christ, and the true joy that comes from knowing Christ.

So let's begin with Paul's resume and what he has to say about our human achievements.

The allure of human achievement

Philippians 3:4-7

...[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.

We've all encountered a person like this. The one, who, no matter the situation, always has a bigger, better, or more impressive story to share. They are known as the “one-upper,” who thrives on elevating their achievements, experiences, or hardships above others'.

At work, they overshadow colleagues by highlighting their own contributions or prior professional triumphs. In social gatherings, they're the ones who've always traveled farther, suffered worse, or succeeded more than anyone else in the room. Even in casual, lighthearted exchanges, they seem to find ways to insert their superiority, often leaving others feeling unheard or diminished.

Now, at first glance, the apostle Paul can seem like a bit of a “one-upper.” And the reason we might feel this way is because that is exactly what he is doing.

In verse 4 he says, ***“If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more...”***

“If those Judaizers think they can use their heritage and their ability to keep the Jewish rules as the basis for their confidence and faith in God, then I'm here to tell you that my family line and my rule keeping scoreboard are better than theirs.”

And just to be sure that the Philippians knew how good his scoreboard was, he walks them through the resume of his exemplary heritage and flawless record as it relates to keeping the Jewish laws.

- **He was circumcised on the 8th day** in accordance with what the law prescribed in Genesis 17:12. Which means that he comes from an upstanding law-keeping family.
- **He is of the people of Israel.** He is a direct descendent of the Abraham, Issac, and Jacob, and is not some pagan convert to Judaism.
- **Paul can trace his proud heritage back to the honorable tribe of Benjamin.** Benjamin was Jacob's beloved son and was the only one of his sons born in the promise land (Gen. 35:16-18). Israel's first king Saul came from Benjamin and when Jereboam revolted against King rehoboam, Benjamin was the only tribe that stayed loyal to Judah and to David's kingly line.
- **He was also a Hebrew of Hebrews.** Which means that he and his family didn't assimilate to the customs and the languages of the pagan culture around them. They stayed distinctly Hebrew in their language and practices.

Those first 4 are the scoreboard of his heritage, whereas the next 3 relate to his works.

- **As it relates to the law, Paul says that he was a Pharisee.** He was associated with the **top group** of moral leaders in Israel who had the strictest form of obedience to the law. In fact, they adhered to all 613 of the written commands in the law and observed the oral laws or traditions that were passed down through Israel's history.
- But he wasn't just an average everyday Pharisee. **No, his zeal for the law and for Judaism were so great that he went above and beyond, and was willing to persecute the church and kill Christians.**
- Finally, Paul says, **as it relates to righteousness, under the law, he was blameless.** Just to be clear, he isn't saying that he achieved sinless perfection or justification through the law, rather he is saying that his record of physically observing the law was basically better than everyone else's.

Paul's heritage, his association with the Pharisees, his zeal, and his ability to physically keep the Old Testament law, put him in a class that is far above the Judaizers or any of the Philippians who are putting their faith and hope in their heritage or ability to keep the Jewish laws.

But Paul's review of his resume and scoreboard are not about vanity or making himself look good. **He has already made it clear to the Philippians in 3:3, that true believers cannot put any confidence in the flesh or their works.**

Rather, Paul is laying out his top-tier resume as a Jew so that the Philippians wouldn't be tempted to accept any teaching that tells them that human heritage or achievement can make them right with God.

This is why he goes on in verse 7 to say, whatever “gain” or “profit” I had, from being of the right family or from being the best keeper of the rules, I count it as loss or as a “detriment” for the sake or cause of Christ.

Paul is waving the warning flag and is saying to the Philippians, **“Look out, beware, and watch yourselves. The dogs, the evildoers, the mutilators of the flesh are tempting you to trust in your works and achievements instead of in Christ.”**

“But remember, I’ve been there, and I’ve done that. And even though I was the best of the best, all of those advantages and all of those works are worthless, when it comes to knowing Christ.”

Application

I remember it like it was yesterday. I came home from school, opened the mailbox, and in it was a letter from Luther College. A letter that I was nervous to open, but at the same time felt confident about what it said.

You see, I had auditioned for their music faculty that spring and one of the preeminent voice teachers there assured me that I would get into the school of music and that I would get a scholarship. So I felt fairly confident that my acceptance was a done deal.

But then I opened the letter and read the following words: **After thoughtful consideration, we regret to inform you that we are unable to offer you admission to Luther College for the upcoming academic year.**

Needless to say, I was crushed.

I thought I had done all the right things in my short musical career to get accepted. But I came to find out that what I actually needed for acceptance was a better GPA.

I had put my hope and trust in my talent, when I should have been focused on my grades.

The allure of our achievements often causes us to do something similar. We knowingly or unknowingly use them as the bases for our acceptance and relationship with God.

- If we come from a Christian family and go to church regularly, then we must be in a right relationship with Jesus.
- I only listen to Christian music, and I stay away from the garbage on the radio, so God and I are good.
- We raised or schooled are kids in a certain way, which means that we have honored God more than others who did it differently.
- I am a real Christian because I have the right political beliefs.
- I must be doing well with Jesus because I talk about him a lot.

But we need to remember like Paul, that all of these achievements, what we might call “gain” or “profit” are actually “loss” when it comes to our acceptance and relationship with God.

They cannot save us, nor can they give us a right relationship with him. **Because true life and lasting fellowship with God are only found in the person and work of Jesus Christ.**

This brings us to Philippians 3:8-9 where Paul says:

The surpassing worth of Christ

Philippians 3:8-9

[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—

One of the best pieces of practical marriage advice that my wife and I ever got was this, ***“invest in a really good bed, because you will spend a third of your life in it.”*** And for people who love their sleep the way we do, this little nugget of wisdom changed our life.

In fact, besides our home and our vehicles, our bed is the most expensive item that we own.

Now, are there other good things that we could have spent that money on? Of course. But we said no to them because the quality of our sleep was a big priority. **It was and is supremely valuable and important to us.**

Similarly, everyone in this room has spending habits that reflect what is important to them. Because in general, humans prioritize whatever we believe to be most valuable or worthwhile to us.

The apostle Paul is no different. He is human, and therefore, has things that he believes are valuable and important. Which means that he is willing to prioritize them and spend his resources on them.

But as we look at Philippians 3:8-9 we can see that he is talking about something that is infinitely more valuable than good sleep or a good mattress, as good as those things are.

Instead, he is pointing the Philippians and us to the **“surpassing worth or superior value” of knowing Christ Jesus as his Lord.”**

And he uses the phrase **“surpassing worth or superior value,”** to show us that knowing Jesus is infinitely better and more valuable than other things. But what other things?

For Paul, what he has in mind was his resume that he used to believe made him right with God. Those things that he used to see as “gain” or “profit.”

But that all changed for Paul on the Damascus Road. If you remember the story, Paul (who was called Saul) was on his way to Damascus with letters that would allow him to imprison Christians in that city. But then something happened. Luke writes it this way in Acts 9:3-5:

[3] Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. [4] And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" [5] And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

Paul had an encounter with Jesus, the living God, and was transformed by his power. For the first time he truly saw his sin and his need for a Savior.

And in a moment, he went from valuing his heritage and rule-keeping ways to valuing Jesus above all other things.

This is why he says in Philippians 3:8: ***[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,***

From the day he encountered Jesus, everything in Paul's former life that he relied on for his hope in God became "loss." That word "loss" actually means that he sees them as harmful, because they are incapable of giving him the forever relationship with Jesus that he desires and needs.

In fact, he even goes on to call his former ways "rubbish." And the Greek word for "rubbish" is *skubalon* which means something like, **"garbage, refuse, or dung."**

Paul gave up everything, all of his privilege and self-justifying ways, because he came to the supernatural realization that knowing Jesus is infinitely more valuable than those things.

And the only way that he could have a relationship with Jesus, as his Lord, was if he rejected his heritage and works as a means of being right with God.

He needed to see them for what they actually were, which is garbage or dung, so that he could receive the righteousness that comes from God. As he says in Philippians 3:9:

[9] and be found in him (Christ), 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 knew that no amount of law keeping could make him right with God. Not him, the Judaizers, the Philippians, or us.

Because real and lasting righteousness is a gift from God that only comes to those who put their hope and faith in Christ.

As Paul writes in Galatians 2:16:

[16] yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

Application

Please hear me this morning: Jesus is our only savior, our only substitute, the only one who could die on the cross for our sins, and is the only one who could justify us before the Father.

Therefore, knowing him is more valuable than anything in the whole world. He is more valuable than your home, your job, your status, and your wealth. And he is even more supremely valuable than your family (Your father, mother, brother, sister, kids, or spouse), or any other relationship in your life.

Nothing compares with Jesus, and like Paul, we need to see everything else in our life as loss or garbage in comparison with knowing and following Jesus. Now, I realize that probably seems harsh, when we apply that to our families, but remember what Jesus said in Luke 14:26:

[26] If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

We must love Jesus and see him as so supremely valuable that every other love and relationship pales in comparison to that one.

Because only when we value and love Jesus above all other things in our lives will we be ready and willing to walk the difficult, but joy-filled path of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord.

Which brings us to our final two verses for this morning.

The True Joy of knowing Christ

Philippians 3:10-11

...[10] that I may know (ginosko) 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.

Every year, from 4th to 6th grade, my school would do a magazine drive, where all the students would sell magazines as a way to raise funds for the school. And as an incentive to sell these magazines, we would get these little toy creatures called Weeples whenever we sold a certain amount.

Then, once the sale was over, the top students that had the most Weeples, would get a limousine ride and a pizza party. Now, I was not what you would call a motivated student, but somehow, in 6th grade, I sold enough magazines, got enough Weeples, and got the limousine ride and pizza party (probably because of my mom).

And I will tell you what, even though I didn't love the work of selling magazines, I sure loved the prize, and who wouldn't. If most of us are honest, we love getting prizes, especially when they don't cost us a lot. **If we could, we would always opt for the prize and skip the work.**

Paul, on the other hand, sees things a little differently. Because for him, the ultimate prize isn't simply a right standing with God in the legal sense. Rather, the ultimate prize for Paul is knowing Christ.

Which is why he says, ***“that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.”***

That word “know,” is the Greek word *ginosko* which points to the idea of having an intimate relationship or knowledge of someone.

So Paul's desire, in being made right with God through Christ, is that he would intimately know Jesus.

Which for Paul involves experiencing Christ's resurrecting power, and participating in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.

And I want to take just a minute on each of these aspects so that we can understand what Paul is trying to say to the Philippians and to us this morning about knowing Christ.

Knowing Christ means experiencing Christ's resurrecting power.

When Paul says in verse 10, ***“that I may know him and the power of his resurrection,”*** he's not talking about experiencing the resurrection. That's in verse 11.

But he is talking about experiencing the power that comes to all believers on the basis of Christ's resurrection. **The living and active power of God.**

- The power of God that raised Christ from the dead (1 Cor. 6:14).
- The power of God that brings salvation to all who believe (Rom. 1:16).
- The power of God that is now active and working in all of God's people (Phil 2:13).

Paul came to know Christ by the resurrecting power of God, and he wants to grow in a deeper and more intimate relationship with Christ by experiencing God's divine power, the power of the Holy Spirit, in his life.

But his experience of God's power isn't just something that happens to him. He doesn't just sit around saying to God, **“Okay God, let me feel your power.....now!”**

Rather, it is something that he experiences as he conforms his life to the will and ways of Jesus.

As Jesus said in Matthew 16:24:

[24] If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

If we want to know Christ deeply through the power of God at work in our lives, then we need to follow him and pattern our lives after his.

Which for Paul, means participation in his sufferings so that we will become like him in his death.

Knowing Christ requires participation in his sufferings so that we will become like him.

Philippians 3:10

[10] that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

Paul has already told the Philippians in 1:29 that their suffering is a part of God's plan. He saved them because of Christ, and he has destined them to suffer because of Christ.

But now in Philippians 3:10, he is telling them that suffering is the way that they will know Christ as they experience God's power at work, making them like Jesus in his death.

Because when we, as Christians, walk through suffering, we are not only living out Christ's example of suffering servanthood from Philippians 2:5-11, but we are actually sharing in his sufferings.

And that word sharing, is the word *koinonia* which means **fellowship**. So we participate and have fellowship with Christ, by the power of God, **when we suffer for Christ**.

Now, I realize that this doesn't seem like good news to us. Because we are often like I was with the magazine drive. I wanted the prize, but not the work.

But Paul's point, as I said earlier, is that the prize is knowing Christ intimately and fully.

Which means that suffering, though hard and unpleasant, shouldn't be seen as something to avoid, but it should be seen as a privilege.

Because God is using it to show us his power, to teach us more about himself, to draw us into a deeper fellowship with Christ as he makes us more like him.

As it says in James 1:2-4:

[2] Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, [3] for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. [4] And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Romans 8:29

*[29] For those whom he foreknew he also predestined **to be conformed to the image of his Son,** in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

I don't know where you are at this morning or what you are going through, but what I do know is that the good news of the cross is that all of your hardships as a Christian are purposeful.

God is using them in your life so that you would see and savor the surpassing worth of Jesus.

That you would turn away from the allure of your achievements, which can't save you, and instead would rejoice in the Lord (Phil 3:1) as you experience the true and lasting joy that Christ provides.

The true joy that comes from knowing, experiencing, and becoming like Jesus as the power of the living God guides you through every trial and tribulation that he has planned for you.

Realizing that he is using all of it to prepare each one of us for the day when we will know Christ fully. The day when we will see him face to face in Glory, and will attain, like Paul, the outcome of our faith, the true and final resurrection from the dead.

Let's pray.