

IN CHRIST ALONE (Philippians - Lessons for the Journey)

Philippians 3:1-11 - August 2, 2020 - Immanuel - Senior Pastor: Dr. Kelly McClendon

Who or what do you most treasure in life? Who or what is most valuable to you? There was a time in my life when I thought all my problems could be solved if I just had a certain amount of money, or a certain amount of possessions, or a certain amount of power. Then I got to the point when I realized I would soon have more money, possessions, and power than I ever thought I would have. That was nice, that's all good, but then I met my wife, and I decided she was worth more to me than all of that put together. Then we had our first child. When I held him for the first time, he was like a small loaf of bread. I never imagined that anything that small could be so precious and valuable to me. It was like the order of the universe changed for me and my whole value system was redirected. That same weight in diamonds or gold or any of the most expensive things in the world would seem like packing peanuts or straw in comparison. I felt the same way when our second son was born, and then, glory to God, when I held our first granddaughter. Wow! She is a game-changer!

There are moments in life, when everything changes.

There's a true story that comes from the sinking of the Titanic. A frightened woman found her place in a lifeboat that was about to be lowered into the freezing north Atlantic sea. She suddenly thought of something she needed, so she asked permission to return to her stateroom before they cast off. She was granted just three minutes and then they would leave without her.

She ran across the deck that was already slanted at a dangerous angle. She raced through the gambling rooms with all the money that had rolled to one side, ankle deep. She came to her 1st class stateroom and pushed aside her diamond rings and expensive bracelets and necklaces as she reached to the shelf above her bed and grabbed three fresh oranges. She didn't know how long she might be adrift on the sea - so she grabbed the only food she had. She then quickly found her way back to the lifeboat and got in and she survived that terrible night.

Thirty minutes earlier she wouldn't have chosen a crate of oranges over the smallest diamond, but when the fear of death boarded the Titanic it quickly transformed all other values. Instantaneously, priceless things became worthless and worthless things became priceless. In that moment she preferred three small oranges over diamonds and a room full of money!

Those people I described earlier, in my family, and a few other people I've been privileged to know, particularly in the church, are more valuable to me than most anything else in this world. However, there is One who is more valuable to me than everyone and everything else in the world put together - more valuable and important than anything I can imagine. **It is Christ.**

One way to explain this concept of changing values is with analogies to economics or accounting. I studied both subjects extensively in college. As I recall, accounting is a matter of balancing the books, or calculating the profit and loss from a given activity, or just keeping track of financial activity, assets and liabilities. Part of that is putting together a set of items on the credit side, and another set on the debit side, and calculating to see how they balance.

This is something like the metaphor used by Paul in our passage from Philippians. In the text you heard Paul adds up all the credits that have characterized his life. Paul shows us his balance sheet. On the plus side he had good parents who kept the law; He was a member of the chosen people of God; He belonged to a royal family - the tribe from which Israel's first king Saul came - his namesake; He had a great education; He was a member, in good standing, of the largest and most respected sect of the Jews; He was known for his zeal and hard work; He was a good, moral and ethical man. His credit balance was very good.

But Paul struck a line through all the items that most people would consider to the good - and he placed the whole lot of them on the other side of the ledger. They were now part of the debit column - liabilities - at least in comparison to a new credit entry.

This was not some kind of miscalculation - an error of math - rather Paul made a deliberate and careful decision. He took all the things that were in his asset column - and decided to count them as liabilities. He said, *"All I once thought gain... I now count as a loss."*

What has caused this remarkable piece of de-constructive accounting? Simply this - Paul discovered something to put on the credit side that is so great - that by comparison - everything else he can imagine can only be seen as a debit - to be counted as a loss.

The only other place this word for "loss" occurs in the New Testament is in Acts 27 (verses 10, 21) in the story of Paul's shipwreck. There we have a good example of how gain becomes loss. The cargo on the ship represented much gain - for the merchants, for the owner of the ship, for the people of Rome. But then the ship encountered a great storm and was in danger of sinking. They had to make some choices about their priorities. In the face of the storm - the things that they had counted as gain were counted as loss for the sake of their own lives. They changed their priorities quite rapidly and threw the cargo overboard. When they left port, their cargo was considered the most valuable thing on board, but when they balanced it against their survival, they reconsidered the relative worth of the cargo and let it all go.

When Paul met Christ and trusted in Him - he realized that all the things he formerly trusted to satisfy him, or to put him in a right relationship with God were actually separating him from God. He also realized that his sinfulness was so deep - such a great liability - that nothing he had put on the credit side was valuable enough to balance his life. So, to avoid a shipwreck, Paul threw those things overboard - He counted Jesus as the only truly profitable part of life.

Listen again to part of this passage, this time from the NLT (Phil 3:7-11),

I once thought all these things were so very important, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the priceless gain of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I may have Christ and become one with Him.

I no longer count on my own goodness or my ability to obey God's law, but I trust Christ to save me.

For God's way of making us right with Himself depends on faith. As a result I can really know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised Him from the dead. I can learn what it means to suffer with Him, sharing His death, so that, somehow, I can experience the resurrection from the dead!

That is a radical form of accounting. Think about your own sense of value and priorities. What things do count as credits on the ledger of your life? One of the most important things any of us can do in life is to settle the issue of whom or what is most important in our lives.

For Paul the greatest priority of his life was knowing Jesus Christ as his Lord. The Greek word used here for "Lord" was the same one used for rulers, emperors, or anyone having absolute authority and power over you, in other words someone to whom you submit your life.

When Paul called Jesus "Lord" he declared that Jesus had authority over him, that Jesus owned him and thus had the right to command his obedience. Paul thought it a good deal.

Most people nowadays are so independent minded that this is hard to swallow. But when you realize, as Paul did, that Christ is the means by which, or through whom, God shares His grace - well then, it makes a lot of sense to submit to Him and to put your trust in Him.

Do the math yourself - calculate and compare the difference between having Christ as the Lord of your life compared to having you or anyone else as the Lord of your life.

Why should we submit to Jesus as the Lord of our lives?

- WE have a limited, finite knowledge. CHRIST has limitless, infinite knowledge.
- WE don't know what the next half-hour holds. CHRIST knows and guarantees our future.
- WE have the experience of a few years. CHRIST has the experience of eternity.
- WE have been often wrong. CHRIST is never wrong.
- WE are often deceived into sin. CHRIST was victorious over the tempter and sinless.
- WE can't even control ourselves. CHRIST controls and holds the whole universe together.
- WE cannot Save ourselves. CHRIST can save, and will save all those who trust in Him.

For Paul there was no greater thing than knowing Christ Jesus as his Lord. Paul was willing to give up anything if that would help him grow in his personal relationship with Christ. Nothing was more valuable. As a matter of fact, he decided that everything else was about as valuable as garbage. Why? Because Grace is worth more than anything and everything you can imagine and Christ is the very embodiment of God's grace.

Paul's new and improved value system led him to place five priorities above all else.

1. Trusting in Christ and His Righteousness.

He wrote, *"I no longer count on my own goodness or my ability to obey God's law, but I trust Christ to save me. For God's way of making us right with Himself depends on faith."*

The Bible scholar Howard Hendricksen says,

“As long as one keeps clinging, even in the slightest degree, to his own righteousness, he cannot fully enjoy [the righteousness of] Christ. The two simply do not go together. The one must be fully given up before the other can be fully appropriated.”

In other words, the Grace and righteousness of Christ is the only way we can enjoy a right standing with God. Righteousness is by grace through faith, not by law-keeping. You could never keep enough laws, do enough good, or be moral enough to deserve God’s grace. God demands nothing less than sinless perfection - only Jesus Christ meets that glorious standard.

Christ alone satisfied God’s laws perfectly. As a man His righteousness was perfect. As God in the flesh - His sacrifice on the cross was perfect - and all sacrifice to save us from sin. So it is Christ alone who is worthy of being truly acceptable to the holiness of God the Father.

The good news of Grace is this - God will accept us too when we are **“one with Christ.”** When we are found to be, in Christ, and we’re known as His - then God looks at us very clearly, but because of grace, God no longer sees our sin - God sees only our savior in its place.

So God counts us as “righteous” on the basis of faith; it is not something we earn by how good we are - or by what we accomplish in life. No. It is **imputed** to us by God - that is, it is given as a gift of God’s grace when we trust in Christ as our savior and Lord. When we are ‘in Christ’ God **declares** us to be righteous in His eyes... God counts us as not guilty.

At the same time that God imputes righteousness, God also gives us His Holy Spirit, and by doing God He **imparts** the power to grow into holiness. So God acquits us and God equips us. Through Christ God declares us not guilty then He gives us the power to change and grow.

2. To KNOW Christ. Paul said that his highest goal in life was to *“know Christ.”* Paul was not saying he wanted to know ABOUT Christ. Paul had lots of information about Jesus, both before and after his conversion. Paul was first a pharisee and then he became the chief theologian of the Christian church. Paul was not talking about information, He was talking about relationship. He wanted to know Christ in a personal and deeper way. Paul gave up trying to earn points to get right with God, he was trying to know Christ who made Him right.

For example when we really want to know Christ, then we read His Word not like we’re cramming for a test... but we read because we’re trying to discover new things about the One we love so our relationship will get even stronger. When we pray we’re not just going shopping, we are communicating with our Father to discover His plan for our life.

When we give or tithe we are not just paying our dues - we’re gladly investing in the work of Christ which is so very important to us. When our primary desire is to know Christ, personally in a loving relationship, the reason we do things changes in light of that value.

3. To know the power of Christ's resurrection. For Paul the resurrection of Christ was not simply a past event in history - not even something that just happened to Jesus. To Paul the resurrection represented a great power which could be released in the life of every Christian. It enables Christ to be alive in us, and present to us, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul told the Galatians, *"It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me"*(2:20). He told the Ephesians, *"While we were dead in our trespasses and sins God made us alive together with Christ and raised us up with Him,"* (2:5). To the Romans he said, *"as Christ was raised from the dead, we too might walk in newness of life ... being united with Him in the likeness of His resurrection."* (6:4-5) and, *"The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead also has given life to our mortal bodies."* (8:11)

Notice - these are all present tense realities - in other words - to be enjoyed now! Paul was saying that the power of the Holy Spirit is available to us when we know Christ - giving us victory over the world and victory over the devil just as He gave Jesus victory over the grave. To personally know the power of the risen Christ - is worth anything else we might give up.

4. To become like Christ - even if sacrifice is necessary. Paul said he wanted to share in the suffering of Christ, becoming like him in his death. If you're like me, you hear that and say, *"Wait, this is where I draw the line. Who would want to suffer or even die? And why?"* But we have to think deeper. I don't think Paul wanted to suffer, but Paul understood that following Christ might require some suffering and sacrifice. Obedience is often costly - but Paul said, *"bring it on."* Paul was saying that he would gladly bear any cost of discipleship if helped people come to a saving faith. That is why Christ came - to seek and save the lost.

Paul was also saying that he hoped to react to the sufferings of this world in the same way that Jesus did - with a character of selfless love - and for the same reasons Jesus did - to bring people back to God. When you live in Christ - you share the heart of Christ for the lost and the hurting. You want to give your life away selflessly for people in need just like Christ did. If Jesus is our Lord, and we share His values, then we should be willing - even eager - to do this.

5. To experience the resurrection from the dead. Finally, Paul said he hoped, *"that, somehow, I can experience the resurrection from the dead."* I don't think the "somehow" here means Paul had any doubts about his personal destiny. You don't need to have any doubts - because salvation is not about you - it is about what Christ has done for you - it's all grace. In chapter 1 Paul wrote, that *"[Christ] who began the good work in us will bring it about to completion."* He also told us in Romans that *"nothing will separate us from the love of God."*

I think Paul said this for at least two reasons.

1. He hoped to be able to somehow demonstrate well the new life God had given him so that people would see the power of God and then put their faith in Christ. Bible scholar James Boice says the Greek word for resurrection here literally means to *"stand up."* In the Greek world, living people were seen as standing up while dead people were lying down.

Paul wanted to be standing up - fully alive - in a world where so many are lying down. He wanted to show others he was living a new life - so they might stand up and live it with him.

2. I think Paul was also speaking with humility because sometimes grace seems too good to be true. John Newton - the man who wrote the great hymn, “Amazing Grace,” once said this,
“ When I get to heaven I shall see three wonders there. The first will be to see many people I did not expect to see. The second will be to not see many people I expected to see. And the third and greatest wonder of all, will be to find myself there.”

In this passage Paul is talking about the most valuable asset in life - Knowing Jesus Christ.

What is so great about knowing Christ? (Again “knowing” refers to faith relationship)

- **When you know Christ** - you don’t need to fear death or hell. When God looks at you - He doesn’t see your sin - He sees the savior who died for you. You are covered with grace.
- **When you know Christ** - you have resurrection power imparted to you by the Holy Spirit who makes Christ alive in us. Greater is He that is in us - than anything else in this world.
- **When you know Christ** - you can know and grow into your true purpose for living - to love God and enjoy Him forever and to serve God and share His love and truth with everyone.
- **When you know Christ** you have a bright future promised to you - paid for in full by Christ. No matter what happens in life or the next - either here or hereafter - you belong to God.

Do you know Christ? I don’t mean - do you know about Christ. I mean - do you know Christ in a personal way? Have you surrendered to Him? Is Jesus both your Savior and your Lord?

You can make that choice today. You can settle your accounts with God by accepting grace. That is not the end of the journey - but it is where you start and it leads all the way to glory.

There is a wonderful song that I like to sing in my devotional time. I think it captures the emotional impact of what I’ve been trying to say this morning. It’s called “*Knowing you.*” I want to sing it for you. But I don’t want this to be a performance - I want this to be a time for prayer and commitment or rededicating your life to Christ. So I encourage you to bow your heads and close your eyes and just listen. I will end this time with a spoken prayer and then we will move into Holy Communion which is a powerful expression of God’s gift of grace.

Knowing You (by Robin Mark)

All I once held dear built my life upon
All this world reveres, and wars to own
All I once thought gain I have counted loss
Spent and worthless now compared to this

*(Chorus:) Knowing you, Jesus knowing you
There is no greater thing
You're my all, you're the best,
You're my joy, my righteousness
And I love you, Lord*

Now my heart's desire is to know you more
To be found in you, and known as yours
To possess by faith what I could not earn
All surpassing gift of righteousness *(Chorus)*

Oh to know the power of your risen life
And to know you in your suffering

To become like you in your death my Lord
So with You to live and never die...

***Knowing you, Jesus knowing you
There is no greater thing
You're my all, you're the best,
You're my joy, my righteousness
And I love you, Lord***