

UNBROKEN JOY

KNOWING CHRIST

Philippians 3:7-11

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 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^{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—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

I have a very foggy recollection of a pastor preaching when I was very young, maybe barely a teenager. I don't know if it was a talk or a sermon, but he was talking about this passage, talking about the subject of knowing God. He made a statement to this effect: that Paul is talking here about knowing Christ in a very personal, intimate way. He compared it to the intimacy of a husband and a wife. He said that the vocabulary used here talks about deep, relational intimacy. I remember being so struck by that, and asking myself, "Is it truly possible to have a relationship with the Son of God so deep, so real, so personal, that it can be compared to the most intimate human relationships?"

The answer is yes! Paul does indeed speak here of very personal, very intimate knowledge, a wonderful, wonderful relationship with Jesus Christ, our Savior and our Lord. I'm a little older now, I hope a little wiser. I understand that human relationships are a gift from God. I also understand that they are not easy, that they are not automatic. I believe that universally we long for great transparent relationship — to be known and to know others. And this passage begins with the most important relationship. Through Paul's own testimony, through Paul's own example, you and I are invited into very personal relationship with Jesus Christ. That relationship will, by the way, impact and transform all of our other relationships.

So, ask yourself about your own relationship with Christ. Because you see, even in human relationships, to really know someone, well it's different than the idea of that relationship. We can desire to get married. We may have a desire to be a parent. We have these human categories of

relationship, but having the relationship is not the same thing as knowing the person, so that the idea of marriage is not the same thing as really knowing your spouse.

Even as a parent, there is a place where we can bring our own preconceived ideas and ideals about what parenthood should look like that is not the same thing as really knowing our child. There are challenges as our child grows. How much will he or she let me into their hearts, to know them?

We might even observe that many times in human relationships we have huge misconceptions about the other person. We can make shallow, superficial evaluation where we think we know the person. There is a need for wonderful, human, transparent relationship and it begins with this most important relationship with Jesus Christ.

Paul is saying here, "I know him and I want to know him more." He is captivated by the knowledge of Jesus Christ. In fact, ask yourself what could happen to a highly, highly successful individual so that he would say, "Everything that I ever considered to be an advantage, everything that got me to this place of success, I now consider all of those advantages to be disadvantages." What relationship, what encounter could lead a man as successful as the Apostle Paul to say, "Everything that I counted as an advantage I now consider to be a disadvantage." Well, the answer is Jesus Christ. The answer is that Paul met Jesus Christ, and it changed everything.

I am going to give you several words to just help you think through your relationship with Christ, asking yourself the question, "Do you know Christ?" and "How do you know Christ?" The first word is resume - verse 7. Verse 7 is the conclusion of Paul's resume. He says in verse 7: "Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ." That resume begins in verse 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: 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; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

In a word, Paul is saying, "I met Jesus Christ and I have rethought my entire resume. Everything that I considered to be an advantage, I now consider to be a disadvantage. Everything that was a gain, I now consider to be a loss." Think for a moment, if you would, about this whole idea of a resume -- you know, a resume where you put your credentials down on a piece of paper, maybe one or two sides of a piece of paper. In human relationships, we are all carrying around a resume. We are all carrying around our credentials. When you meet someone that you want a relationship with, you kind of put your best foot forward.

When I met Beth, I really was putting my best foot forward. We tell this story over and over, that we met in this committee meeting at Texas Christian University, TCU. I was a dorm director, staff member. She was an undergraduate. As you might have suspected, she is tons younger than I am. I saw this beautiful young woman sitting there across the table. I looked at her blouse. It was a unique blouse (this is a true statement), and the first thing I said to her was, "My grandmother has a toilet seat cover made out of material just like that." You mock me, but 28-30 years later, here we are.

I wasn't trying to be a fool. I wasn't trying to insult her. I was trying to be funny. I realize now that I was a little bit of a fool, and insulting her, but I was trying to put my resume out there. This is what we do. More importantly, we accumulate this understanding of credentials so that we can be at peace with ourselves, so that we validate our own existence.

Think about it. In relationships, the reason we keep a record of what we've done and what the other person has done is because we are building that resume. We make statements like, "It's not that you were wrong, you are always wrong." We are discrediting the other person's credentials as we build ourselves up. Why, 20 years after the wedding ceremony, are we still talking about the wedding ceremony? You know, "You had to have it this way." Why?

We all justify ourselves and our own existence through what we perceive to make us a success. Even - and I'll say this word for the single ladies in our presence today - the absence of a resume is not a good thing. That's not the point. The guy who has nothing to offer has nothing to offer. My point is not, "Okay, we don't educate ourselves, we don't work hard, we don't try to be funny and smart and do all of those things."

Paul said, "I have answered the most fundamental question of who I am, now with a different answer! And I was a success!" "I daresay," now I'm summarizing Paul, "to all of those who think that life is found in terms of being a good Jew, a good rabbi, a good teacher of the law, a good follower of the law—I was better than all of you! I had a better resume than all of you. I was at the top of my class." If you want to know God, you've got to rethink your resume.

Jesus taught us this principle in Matthew 13:44-46:

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Jesus is saying that knowing him and being in his kingdom is more valuable than everything else this life has to offer. And that when you see him and the treasure that he is, and the surpassing greatness of knowing him, you'll gladly trade everything else in exchange for knowing him. He pictures two men. One stumbles onto this treasure as he walks across the field. The other is on a quest seeking. But when both see it, they see the value, and there is an exchange of all the other pursuits in life for this one glorious pursuit.

Ask yourself today what brings you happiness. Who brings you happiness? What is your reason for getting out of bed in the morning? What brings you purpose? Is it Jesus Christ and knowing him? Well, it all begins with resume. What are you doing to validate yourself, to justify your existence, to provide hope for tomorrow and happiness throughout? What is it about you that says to a potential mate, a potential employer, a potential friend, "Here, take me." What do you tell yourself to put yourself at ease about yourself?

Paul's summary was, "I live to know Christ." He met him on that road to Damascus. It wasn't a treasure in a field. It wasn't a pearl. He met what those things represent in the person of Jesus Christ when he was on his way to persecute the church, and that introduction changed everything for Paul.

So we begin by rethinking our resume. That's the first word, verse 7. The second word is reversal, verse 8. There is a reversal that takes place. Paul tells us that he not only discarded his previous resume, but that a reversal has taken place in his life. It's not just that those things don't have the same importance, but now they are actually disadvantages.

This is a difficult thought for us. It's alerting us to the tremendous danger of putting our faith in created things, good things, blessings from God. We cannot make those things God. They will actually be terrible disadvantages to us if we trust in them rather than God. So he tells us, "Indeed, I count everything as a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things" listen, "and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ."

There are two ideas. The first idea is an accounting picture of debits and credits, credits and debits. The things that I used to consider to be assets or credits I now put in the loss category, because they actually kept me from Christ. But then he uses a second picture, which is even stronger. He uses the trash heap. The word is offensive to us. It's a word for excrement, for rubbish. He is

saying that compared to knowing Christ, those so-called advantages I now consider to be, in the old King James, “dung.” Nothing can compare to the value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

Jesus said it this way in Mark 8:36: “For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?” We gain insight into the logic of Paul, that those advantages were disadvantages because he trusted in them. He valued them in an ungodly way. The result was that he was losing his very soul. It is difficult for us to really grasp this, but good things like studying the word of God and trying to obey it had become a way and a means of persecuting the very work of God. What a graphic picture it is that when we treasure the gifts of God and the things of God more than knowing God, we actually work against God.

Jesus taught us that when we become a part of his kingdom, there is a reversal that takes place. Consider the beatitudes of Matthew 5 and the great Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5:3: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Listen to the radical nature of Jesus’ teaching -- the complete reversal. When I understand that life is found in Christ and in knowing him, what I boast about now is completely reversed! I’m not constantly trying to convince you of my wealth of spirit. I am freely acknowledging my need and my poverty of spirit so that I might gain the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” Look at this soul who is not constantly self-promoting, or even secretly, cleverly self-promoting, and saying, “I am in need. I am impoverished.” Christ is meeting that need.

“I am hungry and thirsty for righteousness. Lord, if you don’t help me, if you don’t change me, if you don’t transform me, there is no righteousness within me. I am thirsty, Lord God.” Have you ever cried out to God, “Lord, I am just struggling with this sin. Please help me. I am powerless in the face of it”? Have you ever awoken in the morning to say, “Lord, my heart is not right. If this train of thought continues and lays hold of my heart, I will be trapped in such darkness. God, would you have mercy on my soul?”

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Oh how often I, rather than giving mercy, rather than making peace, rather than accepting persecution, how often I want to prove I am right and push my position, and

accuse, and judge, and condemn, and extract payment for the offense that has come against my soul. But there is a reversal. There is a reversal of the “I am always right” thinking that overtakes the child of God, because he has been changed by an encounter with the perfect one, with the Lord Jesus Christ. We boast in Christ.

So, the second word is reversal, but the third word is a word that takes us to the foundation. It’s the word righteousness. In verse 9 we find Paul saying this, “...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.” We come to the root of Paul’s joy, the root of Paul’s life, the root of this reversal that has taken place. He is made right with God. He is made right within himself because of what Jesus Christ has done.

Righteousness comes to him as a gift by faith in Christ. This is the foundation. This is what has brought about the reversal. Now, instead of a resume that pushes his righteousness, his accomplishment, his achievement, however that is defined in the millions and millions of ways and combinations that we come up with to justify and validate ourselves, Paul is saying, “I sweep all of that aside to say that my life and my righteousness are found in Jesus Christ.”

That’s the third “R” -- it’s righteousness. It’s the root, verse 9. Then, really, we gain insight into the subject of these verses with the reward, in verses 10 and 11. The reason for it all is the reward of knowing Jesus Christ. Relationship with Christ is the great reward. Paul is speaking here of intimate, relational knowledge. Look at these verses now: “...that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”

Paul describes knowing Jesus here in four statements. He says:

1. I want to know him and the power of his resurrection.
2. I want to share in his sufferings.
3. I want to become like him in his death, and
4. I want to attain to the resurrection of the dead.

So really, it’s two ideas. It’s suffering and it’s resurrection. Let’s go back to where we began, thinking about human relationship, that human relationship is built through common experience

and time that we share together. Paul is serious about desiring to know Jesus Christ more and he is inviting you in with him to the experience of walking with Christ moment-by-moment, day-by-day. He is describing that as suffering and resurrection. We would say defeat and victory, but both are victory in Paul's mindset, and there is no resurrection without suffering.

He says to you, "Listen, come and meet the one who is perfect and without sin. He suffered for you so that you might be forgiven of your sin. Come and experience his life. He suffered for you and he invites you to know eternal life." Eternal life was defined in this way by Jesus himself in John 17:3: Eternal life is knowing him. It's not just living forever, but it's experiencing a personal relationship with him.

Then Jesus tells us, "I want you to be in relationship with me and to know me and to walk with me, which means that as you identify with me and you give yourself to help other people, you will suffer. You will share in my suffering, and you will experience my resurrection power within you. You will know both."

If we consider the book of Philippians as we have studied through it, we go back to Chapter 2 for a moment. Do you remember in Chapter 2, we saw there a model on how to live? Paul called us to a life of humility and he told us to follow the example of Jesus. He said in verses 3-4: "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." He calls us to humility. He calls us to servanthood.

Look then at verses 5-9:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name...

We saw in these verses this picture of Jesus, the Son of God, who left everything to come and to serve us as a servant, and even to die for us. That compels us to worship him. But the real thrust of those verses is: Here is an example to follow. Look how Paul is methodically building out a

systematic way of seeing life. He is saying, “Okay, he saves you, he gives you an example. But now consider this: He walks with you! The presence of Christ is in you and with you, so that as you give yourself to seeking him and knowing him and following his example, he is there with you. You are sharing in his sufferings and experiencing his resurrection power.”

When God gave me five sons I made an early commitment to try to completely steer all five of them away from playing tackle football, because I was just beginning to hear more and more about the kinds of injuries that happen. I have no official position against football. I love watching it. I enjoy it. If you or one of your family members is playing tackle football, this is not a judgment. It’s an illustration. I am alarmed sometimes as I hear and read about the kinds of injuries that are sustained, and the long-term damage that can be done to a person by getting your head smashed by a 300-pound man who runs the 40-yard dash at an unbelievable speed. If you really step back and think of it -- and I know some of you football fans are going to say, “Wow – this is really a negative way to see it” -- not at all. It’s not. It’s just the truth. Why would you do it? Why would you risk being soft in the melon at 40 years old to play a game? Because we love it, right? I’ve got something better for you than football: sharing in the sufferings of Jesus Christ.

My point in this illustration is that people will suffer all the time for pursuits that are so fleeting, so temporal, really, so shallow, often building a personal resume, where Jesus invites you to reverse it, to take his resume, his righteousness. It’s not only a foundation for life, but it is the glory of knowing him.

Consider this: My savior walked out of the grave. He got up from the dead! Have you ever tried to awaken a teenager at 5:00 am? It seems impossible. But getting up from the dead is impossible. My Lord got out of the grave and he did it after giving his life in horrible suffering for me. I want to know him. I want to know him. I want to walk with him. I want to share in his sufferings. I want to know the power of his resurrection. I will know it partially now, but one day I will know it face to face. I will, by God’s grace, attain to the resurrection of the dead. I will be conformed perfectly into the image of his death, because he has promised it, because he died and rose from the grave to make sure it would happen. I want to know him, and this is the focus of our life. Amen?