

Paul: A Remarkable Man

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[0 : 00] I would like us for a short time this evening to turn to the chapter we read, Paul's Epistle to the Philippians chapter 3.

We can read again at verse 7. 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.

And so on. Paul the Apostle is truly a remarkable man.

But I'm sure you appreciate that. He is someone who has written the most precious material that the Christian can turn to.

[1 : 34] But he wasn't always a Christian. He wasn't always a believer. And we know that. Philippians is written to a group of believers who are found in a place that is a Roman colony.

It is governed by Roman laws. It is structured with structures that, social structures, political structures that are under the sway of Roman authority.

The lifestyle of the people within the community is very much following the example of the Roman style.

When Paul visited Rome, when he visited Philippi, he visited it as directed by the Holy Spirit of God. The church was then established. Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke were led by the Spirit to go there. You'll find the story of that in the book of Acts and chapter 16.

[3 : 00] This epistle was not written in the most easy circumstances. Because in all likelihood, the epistle was written when Paul was at the very least under arrest.

Possibly under arrest. More than likely in prison. And yet, many commentators who write on this epistle identify this epistle as being an epistle of joy.

You wouldn't think that. Bearing in mind the circumstances. That it's the epistle of joy. But it's given that designation simply because of the feeling you get from what Paul writes.

That he delights in writing to this group of believing people. He says to them in chapter 4 and verse 4.

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say rejoice. He is rejoicing in them.

[4 : 17] And he wants them to rejoice with him. And that is desired for the believers. That they would have the joy of the Lord in their heart.

And yet, you cannot forget that Paul at times is far from being the amiable, benevolent figure these thoughts might suggest.

Clearly, when he is writing this epistle, he is aware of those who are opponents to the gospel.

Those who are allied so that the opposition to the gospel is clearly an opposition.

That they wish to manifest destructively as much as possible. If you look again at chapter 3 and what Paul says there about those who are opponents.

He says, look out for the dogs. Look out for the evildoers. Look out for those who mutilate the flesh. It is not very...

[5 : 32] The language is clearly language of somebody who despises the opponents. Who sees what lies behind their endeavour.

Later on in verse 18 he says, he describes the many of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears.

Walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. And as tears, not because they are enemies, but because he is able to see their end.

Their end is destruction. Their God is their belly. They glory in their shame. Their minds set on earthly things. And Paul is not...

He is not someone who is simply moved by the vitriol of personal enmity.

[6 : 33] He is somebody who is moved because he sees the damage these people do to Christian brothers and sisters. And also the damage they do to themselves and to their never dying souls.

Both things are a concern to Paul. I want us to think about the verses before us and just very much on the surface.

Notice some of the things that we can identify as true about Paul. First of all, we are alerted to a changed perspective on the part of the apostle.

Secondly, there is what you could identify as a changed value system. He measures things differently.

And thirdly, there is a changed goal. It is what he is striving for, what he is hoping to achieve.

[7 : 41] It differs to what it once was like. Now, this is a very informative passage of scripture.

And it reminds us of the background to the life of the apostle Paul. Immediately prior to the words that we are looking at, we see Paul reflect, I suppose, on what was true of himself.

He identifies himself as someone who was privileged by birth. Notice some of the things he speaks of there.

He sees himself as someone who once enjoyed these privileges. And he considered them privileges. Maybe not so much now.

But at the time, this was the person who Paul or Saul as he was when these things were true of him. He was somebody who was circumcised on the 8th day.

[8 : 59] An Israelite, a Benjamite, a Hebrew. As to the law, a Pharisee. He zealously persecuted the church.

Righteous as far as he himself understood righteousness. Perfectly keeping the law and receiving plaudits from others.

And perhaps most importantly, as far as he was concerned, he was perfectly content to consider himself a law keeper. That he was free from any form of condemnation.

A personal righteousness with which he was satisfied. And when you take all of these things into consideration, there is, you can't deny the fact that these things were important to Paul.

There was a time when these things were all important. You can imagine him. You know, sometimes you'll find if you visit a person's home, or even in your own home, you'll have certificates on the wall.

[10 : 19] Maybe certificates you received by virtue of your educational prowess. Or sporting prowess. I was visiting a man's recently, and one of the young children there is a more than competent athlete.

And you saw all of these rosettes on the wall. A place of pride. A place rightly given to them. That showed that their endeavor was being rewarded.

And you can imagine the Apostle Paul, and you can, if you can go into his home, if he had a home that was of any kind of description.

It is almost as if these are the things he would put up on the wall. I am somebody. This is my pedigree. This is who I am. I am a real Jew.

I am somebody who's somebody. And he was proud of that. He was somebody who delighted in that.

[11 : 23] Not only delighted in it, but somebody who was ready to go out and do damage to those who were not like him. Especially if they were Christians.

Especially if they followed this usurper Christ. He took delight in wreaking havoc, the scripture says on such.

But now he says things are different. I'm different. I've changed. And what changed me is this.

I met Christ. Or perhaps he would have put it, Christ met with me. And ever since Christ met with me, these things that were so important, these certificates, these rosettes that would have been lined up on the wall and I would have proudly displayed them and proudly boasted of them, they mean nothing to me.

They mean absolutely nothing to me. And it really had to be something for that to happen. It really had to be something that changed Saul to Paul and this Paul to see these things for what they were.

[12:48] Someone has described the way Paul thought now as a person who would have gone to the bank and made a deposit.

And instead of the deposit being reflected in an account that was in the black, no matter how frequently money was deposited, it was always on the debit side.

Because instead of accumulation, there was debt. And as he experiences the change that Christ has wrought in his life, as he looks upon these things that were so important to him, he sees these things as being of no significance whatsoever.

Look at what he says in verse 8. Indeed he says, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus, Christ Jesus, my Lord.

You know, in the authorized version, I think he uses language that some people are not happy with because the language is so strong.

[14:26] But everything he says, as a religious man, his life was governed by acts of righteousness and everything that he did was an accrual of righteousness.

What he said, what he did, where he went, how he worshipped, everything was, he was ticking the boxes, he was doing all these things and merit was on his side.

But all of a sudden, he meets with Christ and Christ turns his world upside down and all of these merits became demerits. He counted these things as the ABCs as dung, as dung.

Some translators would rather think of it as, they have this picture of a celebration, of a, of a party, shall we say, or a feast.

And at the end of the feast, all the leftovers are, are just put to one side. And it's a polite way of saying what Paul is saying.

[15:48] It is rubbish. This, these things that were so important are now considered by me to be rubbish.

And that is something that is clearly indicative of an altered perspective. The things were as they were, but its relation to them changed.

These things would go on in the world. There would be Jews in the world. There would be Benjamites in the world. There would be Pharisees in the world.

There would be engaged in all kinds of activities. But Paul was no longer part of that world. No longer looking to these things to enhance his reputation.

No longer hoping that by these acts of righteousness that in some way he would he would gather sufficient brownie points in the sight of God to give him credence and to give him give him the importance that he craved in the sight of God.

[17:08] So that was the first thing that changed when Paul met with Christ or when Christ met with Paul. He speaks of these things as a consequence.

Now I wonder if those of you who are believers tonight can detect for yourself what became a direct consequence of your encounter with Christ.

if as a Christian you are now able to to weigh up how you saw your life before you met with Christ and what has differed what has changed what are these things that were once so important to you as far as shall we say spirituality was concerned are these things the way they were or has something radically changed I would hope that you would answer in the affirmative that even though you know Paul even though you were not involved in the religious activity that Paul was involved I would be surprised in fact I would be very difficult to be persuaded if those of you who are Christians tonight were not involved in some kind of activity that you would identify as God pleasing that you would be involved in some way in doing something that you considered to be a positive a positive religious act would put it like that maybe a work of charity maybe coming to church maybe not swearing as much maybe not being in the wrong kind of company whatever it was there are many people and that is as far as the religious activity goes but Christian maybe you cannot see these things maybe they're not able to see these but maybe you are if you're a Christian see these things and what made the difference and I want to stress it because sometimes when we live in this world we are often made to think that what has changed in our life as Christians is not really as radical as we imagine it to be we think that it is just a maturing or a moving on or a slight departure from where we once were that it hasn't really been much of a change with regard to

how things were as to how they are now but if you encounter Christ and if Christ has changed your life surely there are things you can recognize that Christ changed in you surely there are things you can identify as being the consequence or the result of

[20 : 58] Christ's influence on your life and it's important for you to know that and to understand that it is his doing because there's a need for it there's a need to be a change but there's also a need to recognize the change where it is because we encounter and we experience plenty discouragement in this world and we should appreciate what God through his word helps us identify as things that God has done for us well the second thing we can see is not only can Paul speak of what he once considered as important the perspective has changed as far as these things are concerned but there's also an alteration a change to the value system if we think of it like this he saw something that he appreciated more than any of these things he saw the wonder of Christ the Christ that Paul discovered or the

Christ that revealed himself to Paul is someone who surpassed by far anything and everything that he ever considered worthwhile in the past there was you know the story of the missionary a missionary who along with three or four companions lost his life when he went with the gospel to Indians away in the jungle and his plane I think came down or a man called Jim Elliot and what he said has often been quoted but long before he lost his life along with his companions he had written or he had declared the following he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose and in many respects you can only say that if you understand the value of your soul if you understand the value of your life in the sight of

God because your whole understanding your whole appreciation of what God in Christ has done for you influences the way you think the Christ that Paul gained could not be compared to anything that Paul knew he found a Lord and a master that he joyfully served he rejoiced in the Lord and he encouraged others to rejoice in the Lord even in chains even enslaved and waiting to experience death as a martyr he still rejoiced in the Lord he understood that he possessed a righteousness that he could not have in any other way that the righteousness that was now his could not be his apart from

Christ and you know that is a marvelous discovery it should be a discovery to any one of you anyway but if your whole life is geared towards an outworking of a righteousness making yourself right with God by doing this that and the other thing and believing that you are making yourself right with God by doing whatever it is by attending church by attending presenting sacrifices by doing all the things that the law of God requires as far as the Old Testament is concerned if your whole life is geared to that kind of activity when God in his grace presents you with Christ and instead of these things he says to you all of these things are irrelevant all of these things all of these righteousnesses are as another said as filthy rags no in

Christ you have something better something more lasting something more permanent something that is well unimpeachable it can't be challenged it can't be questioned it can't be cancelled out it's the same always there's no threat to it and if Paul is presented with that fact no wonder he is in awe of Christ when you look at what Christ in the gospel suggests to us surely the Christian believer is somebody who says well there is my sin and my sin has been cancelled the death is no more the filthy stain is removed it's no longer a blight on my life blotted out and when you grasp that when you understand that like

[27 : 33] Paul you can say that you you delight didn't 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 that God depends on faith and that's what Paul rejoices in that's what he encourages others to rejoice in you know when he writes his epistle to the Corinthians the second epistle I think it is chapter 5 he speaks there of being reconciled to God having peace with God and he writes this he says for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God not just that he would possess righteousness but that he would become righteous and become righteousness in the sense in which

God delights in it what a transformation God has supplied it and Paul you see like many others were blind to what God was doing blind to the promises that God had made and that God had provided through the prophets and the prophets were meat and drink to Paul he had read what they said he had labored intensively in discovering the truth that the prophets brought before him and yet it took the grace of God and the transforming power of the spirit to open his eyes to marry the two

together God's promises in the old testament and the fulfillment of promise in the person of Christ for him to see that it was transformative it changed everything he understood that the cross that he supplied was that and the perfection of righteousness that Christ supplied was beyond measure beyond worth it was something he couldn't conceive of before that so his whole value system was changed he saw everything as God allowed him to see it now have you come to that have you seen this for yourself

I would sincerely hope you have have you understood the transaction carried out on the cross where God cancelled the sin of his people through the death of his son and said to each sinner who by faith had come to Christ your death is no more your sin is no more and when you come to that place you're just like Paul you're marvelling you're wondering you're delirious with delight and you're rejoicing in the Lord who has provided for you what no other could and how different the approach of Paul became instead of God being indebted to him which is really what a person is doing when he's coming with a works righteousness you're making

God your debtor I have done this for you God now you you pay me but when God dealt with the sin of Paul by way of Christ Paul couldn't get over it his debt to God was real but he knew that he could never pay that debt God made provision and all he had to do was avail himself of that provision the final thing is this a changed goal a changed goal having established an appreciation of its worth he makes it known that he will not be satisfied with anything less he makes it known that he will not be satisfied with anything else nothing else and nothing less and he wants not just

Christ but the full possession of Christ he wants to gain Christ be found in Christ to know Christ surely he knows Christ already no he knows Christ but he wants to know more of Christ he wants to know Christ in every conceivable way possible he wants to see for himself discover for himself learn for himself everything possible that can be learned about Christ so that he can know him better is that not the whole point of what he is saying however there is an increased interest that this limited resources cannot satisfy he wants intimacy he wants proximity he wants all of the things that he can't possibly bring to himself but look at what he is saying he is saying that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share his suffering become like him in his death he wants the dynamis of the resurrection what resurrection is he talking about there is he talking about his own resurrection is he looking forward with anticipation to the fulfillment of scripture where all

[33 : 59] Christians once they die will rise and be with Christ for eternity is that what he is talking about well not really what he is thinking of here is that the power of Christ liberating him from the power of sin rising up to newness of life you remember when he speaks to the Galatians in chapter 2 there he says the following for though the law for through the law I die to the law so that I may live to God I have been crucified with Christ it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me I do not nullify the grace of God for if righteousness were through the law then Christ died for no purpose he wants to experience for himself the growth of grace that the believer has every right to expect every right to to achieve taking

I from the throne and placing the crown upon the head of Christ making progress yet being dissatisfied with the progress that is being made because you can never progress sufficiently to say I have arrived I have achieved I have accomplished all that I can possibly attain to as a sinner you are always because of the life of Christ in you wanting more that's what Paul is wanting that's what the Christian is wanting you know go back again to how Paul began this in verse 4 and verse 5 he's describing what was true about himself though I myself have reasoned for confidence in the flesh also you know this is what was true of him he believed that he was he was somebody who was somebody he believed that as a law keeper there was nobody like him that's not what he's looking to know that's not what he's wanting to achieve now that's not what he's wanting by way of progression what he is wanting is more of the grace of

God in Christ to to govern his existence to govern his experience of living in the world as a believer and it's something that the believer will have with him all their days I was thinking of this in this way I remember hearing being told of a Christian elder who was on his deathbed and what he said and often thought of it often spoken of it that on his deathbed his prayer his desire was to be found in Christ to be found in Christ in a way in which he was more convinced than he had been prior to that that was what was true of him

I don't think at that moment he was questioning his salvation but what he was wanting was more of the same more more conscious awareness of being in Christ and sometimes of course the enemy

is never far from God's people even when they're approaching death the enemy never rests and he certainly doesn't want God's people to be at rest but there was another occasion another experience this was a Christian minister and he was he was in his deathbed no doubt and he had been unwell for a long time and he was being cared for by his wife and she was not I mean occasionally she would hear him speak and sometimes it would be asking for her help sometimes he would be in prayer it wasn't easy for her to find out what he was doing whether he was calling for her help or calling to God for help in prayer but this time just a few hours before he died she went in and he was there and he began to speak to her instantly about his own experience and he said he just spoke about the wonderful saviour that he had and the wonderful salvation that he had accomplished and one thing that he said remained with her do you know what he said to me do you know what he said to me this was him speaking about Christ your sins and iniquities [40 : 06] I will remember no more forever it was as clear to him in that deathbed experience what needs to be the experience of every believer and that's where you want to go this is where you want to be found this is the confidence you need to be having as Paul has here becoming like him in his death that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead that's what he's asserting that's what he's declaring that he wants this confidence to be his that he wants this assurance that he wants this to be the outcome of the reality of his faith in Christ no is it yours are you where Paul is are you where

Paul was do you expect to be there can you look at the transformation can you look at the change rot in you can you see the different value system can you see this objective what you're striving for what you're hoping to gain I'm not saying that any Christian here should doubt their salvation there's nobody who's a Christian can be more saved than they already are because once you're saved you're saved once you're in Christ you're in Christ once you're secure through faith in him that can't change but your appreciation of what it means can your experience of what it means can that's what Paul is speaking about he's describing to us the consequence of his development if you like well may that be true of each one of us that we can understand that

God can do this for us through Christ the Lord let us pray help us to appreciate that those who are your people can grow and be nurtured under your own hand by the spirit that we may be assured of the changes wrought in us as a consequence of coming to know Christ putting our trust in him being assured of the perfections of his own righteousness imputed to us so that we do not look to or trust in our own righteousness not that we should be without worked out righteousness of our own but that we should trust our salvation to his and that we should want greater knowledge better knowledge deeper knowledge and knowledge of him that would enhance our relationship with him in this world bless us in his name we pray cleanse us from all sin in his name amen we're going to sing in conclusion from psalm 85 from the scottish psalter psalm 85 and at verse 6 page 340 of the scottish psalter verse 6 to the end that in thee may thy people joy wilt thou not us revive show us thy mercy lord to us to thy salvation give i'll hear what god the lord will speak to his folk he'll speak peace and to his saints but let them not return to foolishness to them that fear him surely near is his salvation that glory in our land may have her habitation truth met with mercy righteousness and peace kissed mutually truth springs from earth and righteousness looks down from heaven high if what is good the lord shall give our land shall yield increase justice to set us in his steps shall go before his face we shall sing these verses in conclusion psalm 85 from the scottish altar that in thee may thy people joy wilt thou not us revive but in thee may thy people joy will thou let us revive show us thy mercy

Lord to us till thy salvation give I'll hear what God the Lord will speak till his folk can speak peace and to his saints but let them not return to foolishness to them that fear him surely near his salvation that glory in our land may have her habitation salvation truth met with mercy righteousness and peace is mutually truth springs from earth and righteousness lifts down from heaven high yea what is good the

Lord shall give our land shall yield and grace just to set us in his steps just though pay for his faith now may grace mercy and peace from God the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit rest and abide with you all now and always amen