

“The True Israel”
Philippians 3:1-3
(Preached at Trinity, February 12, 2017)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In **Verse 1** Paul charges the Philippians to rejoice in Christ. To celebrate their rich relationship with Him. Paul reminds them of the joy he finds in teaching them, even when he taught the same things over and over.
Philippians 3:1 NAU - "To write the same things *again* is no trouble to me"
2. Paul tells them his careful teaching was for their protection; protection from the false teachers who were seeking to rob them of their hope in Christ. In **Verse 2** he calls them “dogs,” “evil workers,” and “false circumcision.”
He precedes each with the word, “beware,” each in the imperative, as if Paul is sounding the alarm. Paul exclaims, “beware, beware, beware!” Paul was becoming aware of a great threat to the Gospel in the church of Philippi. Paul has in mind one enemy, not three.
 - a. In our culture we don't fully grasp Paul's use of dogs to describe the false teachers. In the first century dogs were not pets like we know them today. People didn't bring them into their homes. They were wild scavengers, large and savage. They lived largely off of discarded garbage. The thought of dogs living in the home licking your face would have been repulsive in ancient days. The Biblical descriptions are not flattering. After the death of Ahab we read:
1 Kings 22:38 NAU - "They washed the chariot by the pool of Samaria, and the dogs licked up his blood "
In the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus
Luke 16:20-21 NAU - "And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, ²¹ and longing to be fed with the *crumbs* which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores."
Peter uses dogs and pigs to describe the apostate.
2 Peter 2:22 NAS - "It has happened to them according to the true proverb, "A dog returns to its own vomit," and, "A sow, after washing, *returns* to wallowing in the mire."
Paul is saying of false teachers that they were savage, and contemptible.
 - b. The term “evil workers” is self-explanatory. Work describes the expenditure of energy. These false teachers diligently gave themselves to their false teaching. While they claimed to be agents of truth they were actually engaged in great wickedness leading men astray.
 - c. Beware of the “false circumcision.” The term “circumcision” describes the Jews. Only Paul is calling them false Jews.

3. These heretics were called Judaizers. What was the nature of their false teaching? It was the same teaching that was so prevalent in the first century church. Jewish teachers had become attracted to Christianity but were insisting that Christians had to follow all of the practices of Judaism. In order to be saved you had to be circumcised. In other words, they were teaching that a Gentile had to become a Jew before he could become a Christian. Paul called this a false Gospel, a damnable heresy. To the Galatian churches he wrote: **Galatians 1:6-8 NAU** - "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; ⁷ which is *really* not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!"
4. In **Verses 2-3** Paul makes an interesting assertion. These false teachers claimed to be the true people of God, those circumcised according to the Mosaic Law. Paul declares that Christians who have trusted Christ by faith alone, both Jew and Gentile, are the true circumcision. These are the true Israel of God. **Philippians 3:3 NAU** - "we are the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh"
- A. This is theology that Paul taught consistently:
Romans 2:28-29 NAU - "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. ²⁹ But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God."
Galatians 6:15-16 NAU - " For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. ¹⁶ And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy *be* upon them, and upon the Israel of God."
- B. William Hendriksen:
 "Language could not be clearer. The notion that God even today recognizes two favored groups—on the one hand the church and on the other the Jews—is thoroughly unscriptural. This Jew-Gentile church, the church in which neither circumcision nor uncircumcision amounts to anything, is the Israel of God. All those who belong to this church have Abraham as their father."¹
5. This is often a point of contention and controversy today. How are we to identify Israel today? Dispensationalists, who seem to be in the majority, insist in a distinct division between Israel and the present day church. They hold that God has a separate plan for national Israel and for the church. Paul declares in Galatians that such division has vanished in the New Covenant. The church is the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. The church is God's Israel. The church hasn't replaced Israel. The church IS Israel. **Galatians 3:7-9 NAS** - "Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. ⁸ And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, "All the nations shall be blessed in you." ⁹ So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer."

¹ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of Philippians*, New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 5:152.

Galatians 3:28-29 NAS - "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.²⁹ And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."

6. This is a huge issue of great importance. Does God have two distinct people on the earth today—Christians and Israel? Does God still have promises to ethnic Israel or do these promises find their fulfillment in Christ and the Church? This subject not only impacts our theology, it even impacts international policies. Do the Jews have a God-given right to possess present day Israel?
This morning I want to look into this issue.

I. In the Old Covenant the Jewish nation of Israel was the Kingdom of God

A. God inhabited Israel

1. He ruled through Israel, He spoke through Israel
2. The promises of God were given to Israel.

Romans 3:1-2 NAS - "Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? ² Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God."

B. The Old Covenant was a conditional covenant to national Israel

1. God's promises to Israel demanded obedience – in this sense they were conditional. The grammatical texts are often set up as conditional statements.

Exodus 19:5 – "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth *is* mine:"

Deuteronomy 7:12 NAS - "Then it shall come about, because you listen to these judgments and keep and do them, that the LORD your God will keep with you His covenant and His lovingkindness which He swore to your forefathers."

2. Israel did not obey. They did not keep God's covenant.
But Israel's disobedience would not make void God's promise to Abraham which was not conditional.

God's promise was a covenant of faith that would find its fulfillment in Christ.

- a. Being a physical descendant of Abraham did not automatically make you an heir of the promise. The true heirs were children of faith. This means there was always a remnant of faith within national Israel.

- b. God will always have a remnant of His elect people

Romans 9:27 NAS - "And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, it is the remnant that will be saved;"

Romans 11:5 NAS - "In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to *God's* gracious choice."

- c. God will always have a remnant of His faithful people upon the earth. Jesus asked the important question:
Luke 18:8 NAU - "when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"
The answer of course is, absolutely!
3. National Israel did not keep covenant. Because of their failure to repent, Israel was thrown back into the Gentile world.
- Both the Northern and Southern tribes rebelled against God.
 - The Southern tribe of Judah was judged and carried off into the Babylonian captivity, but would later be restored.
 - The Northern tribes were judged, conquered by the Assyrians and forever scattered.
 - This was the beginning of the Kingdom being stripped from ethnic Israel
4. Clearly, being a physical descendant of Abraham carried no guarantee that a person would remain among God's covenant people without consideration of his faith and faithfulness to God.
Romans 9:6-8 NAS - "But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel; ⁷ neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "through Isaac your descendants will be named."
⁸ That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants."
5. But the Exile did not end the Old Covenant.
- C. National Israel was not cast off completely. God would have His remnant. Hosea's children would be used to describe the future of Israel.
Hosea 1:9-11 – "Then said God, Call his name Loammi: for ye *are* not my people, and I will not be your God. ¹⁰ Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, *that* in the place where it was said unto them, Ye *are* not my people, *there* it shall be said unto them, Ye *are* the sons of the living God. ¹¹ Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great *shall be* the day of Jezreel."
- This has been interpreted in various ways
 - Some see the fulfillment when Judah returned from Babylon and many of the 10 tribes of Israel joined with them.
 - Some see the fulfillment during a general conversion of the Jews in the latter days.
 - But Paul quoted Hosea as referring to God's inclusion of the Gentiles
Romans 9:22-26 NAS - "What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? ²³ And *He did* so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, ²⁴ *even* us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles. ²⁵ As He says also in Hosea,

"I will call those who were not My people, 'My people,' And her who was not beloved, 'beloved.'" ²⁶ "And it shall be that in the place where it was said to them, 'you are not My people,' There they shall be called sons of the living God."

2. The Gospel of John alludes to the Hosea passage in **John 1**
Hosea 1:10 NAS - "Yet the number of the sons of Israel Will be like the sand of the sea, Which cannot be measured or numbered; And it will come about that, in the place Where it is said to them, "You are not My people," It will be said to them, "You are the sons of the living God."
John 1:11-13 KJV – "He came unto his own, and his own received him not. ¹² But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, *even* to them that believe on his name: ¹³ Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. "
 a. Jesus later indicated that the Kingdom would be taken from Israel
Matthew 21:43 NAS - "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it."
 b. Yet, God has not cast off the Jews of Israel altogether.
Romans 11:1-5 NAS - "I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. ² God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in *the passage about* Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? ³ "Lord, they have killed Thy prophets, they have torn down Thine altars, and I alone am left, and they are seeking my life." ⁴ But what is the divine response to him? "I have kept for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." ⁵ In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice."
 c. Paul made it clear that the natural branches that had been broken off might be grafted in again removing any cause of boasting among the Gentiles.
Romans 11:20-21 NAS - "Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; ²¹ for if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you."
Romans 11:23 NAS - "And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again."
 d. Any Jew being "grafted back in" will occur the same way as any other believer – according to God election of individuals.
Romans 11:5 – "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace."
 They will be grafted back in through the preaching of the Gospel of Christ which is freely offered to all.

Matthew Henry writes: "The unbelieving Jews have no reason to quarrel with God for rejecting them; they had a fair offer of righteousness, and life, and salvation, made to them upon gospel terms, which they did not like, and would not come up to; and therefore, if they perish, they may thank themselves—their blood is upon their own heads."²

II. The New Testament makes it clear God has but one covenant people

A. There is no division between Jew and Gentile today

1. The true sons of Abraham are the children of faith—listen to **Gal. 3: Galatians 3:7-9 NAS** - "Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. ⁸ And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, "All the nations shall be blessed in you." ⁹ So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer."
2. This has always been the case, even in the Old Covenant
The true Jew has always been one inwardly, in the heart, not outwardly by circumcision.

B. Many make the charge that we are teaching what is called "Replacement Theology"—that the church has replaced Israel. The charge also goes forth that any claim that the church is the Israel of God demands "spiritualizing" Scripture.

1. The truth is that God has always had but one single people. He has always had an elect remnant. This has always been the church. And this doesn't require spiritualizing Scripture. It is the clear literal teaching of Scripture
2. The church hasn't *replaced* Israel. The church *is* Israel, and always has been. Paul isn't describing the "New Israel." He is describing THE Israel—the true circumcision.
3. God's promises to ethnic Israel have found their full expression in the church. It is a NEW covenant, signifying that the old has passed away.
4. Notice the wording of the New Covenant
Jeremiah 31:31-33 NAS - "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. ³³ "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

² Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2219.

Hosea 2:23 NAS - "And I will say to those who were not My people, 'You are My people!' And they will say, '*Thou art my God!*'"

Romans 9:26 NAS - "And it shall be that in the place where it was said to them, 'you are not My people,' There they shall be called sons of the living God."

Conclusion:

1. God's promises to Abraham have all ultimately fulfilled in Christ and delivered unto the church, the true Israel, the true circumcision.
2. The wonderful thing about God's covenant is He invites you to enter in. This is God's offer of grace to all men. Remember, Jesus Christ has met every requirement, every demand – He is the surety, the Guarantor.
John 1:12 NAS - "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,"
3. Are you resting in Christ? Are you the true circumcision? Are you a part of His covenant blessings? Are you a part of the Israel of God? God has but one people of promise, one way of salvation.
4. Do you understand the blessings of being a child of promise—of being the true Israel of God? All the promises to Israel, are ours since we are united to Christ, the true seed of Abraham. We are joined to a great nation, innumerable people
1 Peter 2:9-10 NAS - "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for *God's* own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰ for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."