

April 5, 2015
Sunday Morning Service
Easter
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from Philippians 3:7-11.

1. Do you know anyone who would be religious but unsaved like Saul was?
2. When you were born again, what did it cost you?
3. What does the righteousness of Christ replace in us?
4. How are you getting to know Christ and the power of His resurrection?

THE POWER OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION **Philippians 3:7-11**

There was a man who lived many years ago who in many ways was like us or at least like people we may have known in our lifetime. He was born into a strict religious family. His parents may not have demanded strictness in lifestyle which would have caused them not to fit well in society. But they were sticklers about keeping the traditions and the rules handed down by the elders. This man's father was a Pharisee who could trace his lineage all the way back to Benjamin one of Father Jacob's sons.

The boy grew up attending meetings at the local synagogue, reading and memorizing the Torah, and studying the writings of Jewish leaders and teachers. As a young man, he attended the best Jewish school available and was so erudite in his training as a Pharisee that he enjoyed success above all his peers. It is likely that

the man was on his way to becoming a leader in the Sanhedrin, the ruling religious body of the Jews. His name was Saul who grew up in Tarsus.

While the man was progressing in his upwardly mobile ways in religion, he was faced with an enigma. His name was Jesus the man from Nazareth. He too was a Jew. He was born in the tribe of Judah another of Jacob's sons. But Jesus wasn't an Israelite in the way Saul was. Instead of embracing the traditions and rules of the elders and Pharisees, Jesus constantly exposed those people as religious hypocrites who did not even keep their own rules.

The worst thing about Jesus, as far as successful young Saul was concerned, was that He claimed to be the Son of God, yea, co-equal with God. That was as blasphemous a claim as anyone could possibly make in Saul's opinion. And yet, some people actually believed that Jesus was a prophet sent from God, a gifted teacher who taught truth, and a doer of actual miracles. Some people went so far as to believe that Jesus of Nazareth was actually the promised Messiah—the Christ described often in the old Scriptures Saul had learned.

Finally, Saul's peers and friends—the religious leaders—had their way and convinced the Roman authorities to kill Jesus. They crucified Him. But any reprieve for Saul and his kind was short-lived. Within about three days, rumor spread like wildfire that Jesus had risen from the dead and was going around Palestine meeting with His followers in various places. Surely Saul concluded that this was the most absurd story yet about Jesus. Eventually, he began to hear that Jesus miraculously ascended into heaven; that is, He returned to God the Father. No doubt Saul thought, "Good riddance."

Instead of the Jesus story dying out, it suddenly spread like a California forest fire on a summer day all over the ancient Middle East. Saul took personal offense to the way the followers of Jesus kept telling people over and over that Jesus was the Christ the Son of the living God and that salvation and eternal life was to be gained through faith in Him alone. Saul was running himself ragged chasing these people all over the region threatening them, putting them in jail, beating them, and even authorizing the execution one of the fellows named Stephen.

Then one day while Saul was traveling the road to Damascus in order to arrest some more followers of Jesus, Jesus Himself knocked down that proud Pharisee in the middle of the road and had a talk with him. Everything changed. Suddenly Saul the zealous Pharisee who tried to kill the story of Jesus became Paul the Apostle who couldn't stop telling the story of Jesus. He traveled thousands of miles telling the good news that Jesus has risen from the dead to become the Savior for every sinner who will confess sins and trust in Jesus' sacrifice for forgiveness from God.

In a nutshell, that covers the verses of our text. Paul told the Christians in Philippi, and us, what motivated him to give his whole life to tell the story of Jesus who he once tried to obliterate. Paul just wanted to know from experience the power of Christ's resurrection. What is that?

This week multiplied millions of religious people have celebrated Easter in some form. Many have marched in the streets, some have flagellated themselves, and others have pretended to be crucified, even to the point of having nails driven through their hands. Nearly every television network is airing some kind of movie about Jesus—though none of them is very accurate. Today millions of people are attending church services to celebrate Jesus' resurrection. But what is the point? Why all the religious activity? Well, it's Easter and this is just what people have done on Easter for hundreds of years. Again I ask, "Why?"

Even people who profess to be followers of Jesus Christ seem to miss the point that Paul the Apostle learned. He understood that the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave was not just an amazing event to be celebrated once each year. The resurrection of our Savior is the supreme demonstration of power and authority over all the power and schemes of hell and Satan. The authority that Christ revealed when He walked out of the tomb is the foundation on which our hope for eternity stands. Throughout life we are learning and working toward the full expression of Christ's power when we too will rise from the grave to live forever with Him. Easter is not only the celebration of a grand event in the past. It is the renewal of hope for the grandest event in our lives in the future.

Human Gain Is Not the Goal (vv.7-8).

In a statement that clearly cuts across the grain of common sense, Paul contended that what we gain through our efforts is useless. Who believes that? Normal people consider personal gain as profitable. But what does Paul confess about *whatever gain I had (v.7a)*? Most people would weigh in with some opinion on the matter because we live to gain profit or advantage. We are taught that life is the field of competition. The consensus seems to be that the guy with the most toys at the end is the winner. We wear ourselves ragged seeking to gain more possessions, more education, more experiences, more memories.

Trying to gain stuff is pretty common. But the critical issue in this text was Paul's attempts to gain standing with God. Most people aren't even thinking about that. His statement about gain follows in the context of his list of privileges and accomplishments that most humans would consider gain toward getting into heaven. He was circumcised on the eighth day (v.5). He was born an Israelite (v.5). He was born in the tribe of Benjamin (v.5). He was thoroughly Hebrew (v.5). He was a Pharisee, the law keeper of law keepers (v.5). He even persecuted people who he considered to be apostates from the one true religion (v.6). In his world, people presumed that guys like Paul would be the very first in line at the gates to the kingdom of heaven.

His world was not so odd compared to our experience. Paul was like many religious people in our world. They go to church whenever the doors are open. They read the Bible, study the Bible, and talk about the Bible. They do nice things for poor people and the unfortunate. They protest societal ills and vices. They are the first to step up with natural disaster strikes somewhere in the world. Human nature teaches that people like this will be the first to enter heaven.

All opinions like that change when a person is impacted by Christ's resurrection. At that point, the person who seemed quite normal in the past now counts all gain as loss for Christ. We might stand amazed at Paul's conclusions. He wrote, *I counted as loss for the sake of Christ (v.7a)*. This means that all the accomplishments that Paul once considered to be gain, he now counted as loss. The Greek syntax indicates that something caused Paul to come to the conclusion that all those things were actually a disadvantage, things forfeited. His past gains he now forfeited for the sake of Christ.

Obviously something about Christ drives us to conclude that our works of righteousness, our attempts to get right with God are useless.

Second, Paul concluded, *Indeed, I count everything as loss (v.8a)*. Now it was not just supposed gains that he abandoned. Now everything was in the crucible. Again we need to remember that “everything” applies specifically to his attempts to gain God’s favor. If every attempt to become right with God is loss, what is left? This is beginning to look like complete, entire vulnerability. No normal person likes to be in this condition.

Over the years I have had a recurring dream that doesn’t make sense to me. In this dream I am flying in the air, like a bird, like superman. The overwhelming thought in this dream is not, “Wow, I have freedom just like Peter Pan.” Rather, there is a dread that I have no support. What is keeping me in the air? I feel a need to flap my arms or do something to keep from crashing. It is just a dream. I am not convinced it means anything. However, it is how people feel when they realize that there is not one good work they can do that will ingratiate them to God. You can flap your spiritual arms all you want, but it won’t get you into heaven.

Third, Paul concluded, *For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish (v.8c)*. Because of his new found relationship with Christ, Paul considered all his religious activity and accomplishments as rubbish. The Greek word translated *rubbish* is more accurately what we will find if we visit the local sewer plant. When we enter this relationship with Christ, we will have to suffer the loss of all things. It is painful, it is suffering, it does come with an intense feeling of loss when we realize that by nature we are spiritual beggars in the sight of God.

Jesus explained this condition of becoming empty of self in order to be born again like this: *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3)*. It means that we come to realize that we have absolutely nothing to offer God in exchange for our sins. He taught, *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Matthew 5:4)*. In this state, we suffer loss of pride and mourn that we have offended God by our sins. But He comforts us. How does this happen?

We come into this state or condition by who we know. Who we know is important. My father-in-law used to say, “You can never know too many people.” He would say, “Sometimes what you know is not as important as who you know.” To that end (and far beyond human relationships), Paul confirmed that redeemed people are glad to lose all in exchange for knowing Christ. Paul gladly counted all things loss *because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord (v.8b)*.

Previous to his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus, Paul was familiar with Jesus who they called the Christ. We do not know that they ever met, though they could have. We know that Paul agreed with the martyrdom of Stephen within about a year of Christ’s ascension. But when Christ waylaid Paul that day, Paul came to know Christ. The Greek word translated *knowing* is *gnosis* which gives us the various nuances of knowledge in the English language. It means to come to know something or someone through experience. At the same time, it can refer to a deep or special knowledge. A group arose in the late first century called the *Gnostics* who claimed to have a special spiritual knowledge about God that only the initiated people possessed. It was heresy.

The equivalent of this Greek word in the Hebrew Old Testament is *yada*. We know that this kind of knowing is defined as a very intimate relationship such as the intimate physical relationship between husband and wife. What Paul referred to then was a deep, abiding intimate knowledge of the person Jesus Christ—who he once rejected. He concluded that this deep relationship with Christ was of far greater value than all his past accomplishments. That relationship is incomparable in value.

What value do we place on knowing Christ Jesus as our personal Lord? To religious people, Jesus Christ is an important historical and religious figure. They generally believe that His birth should be celebrated on Christmas. They generally believe that He was a good man, a good teacher, and a miracle worker. They generally believe that He had some kind of special communication with God. They generally believe that He was tortured and crucified. They generally believe that He rose from the tomb, which ought to be celebrated on Easter. They generally believe that in some unique way He went into heaven—wherever that is.

However, to redeemed people, knowing Christ surpasses every other experience and accomplishment in life. We who know Christ intimately know Him in each of three offices indicated by the threefold title Paul used here. When we know Christ intimately, we are delighted that He is our high priest. The title Christ refers to the promised Messiah who God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit ordained to bring the message of salvation like an old prophet or preacher. The message of Christ is still a stumbling block to sinners and great news for saints.

When we know Jesus intimately, we are delighted that He is our Savior from sin. The angel who brought word to Joseph that Mary was pregnant by the Holy Spirit instructed him to name the baby Jesus because His work would be to save His people from their sins (Mat. 1:21). The price to save His people was nothing less than Jesus being sacrificed as the final sacrifice for sin. He provided His own blood for the acceptable sacrifice. Now as our high priest, He is in heaven interceding for sinners pleading His own blood as the basis for forgiveness.

When we know the Lord intimately, we are delighted to acknowledge Him as our king. This is the word “Lord.” The Lord is the superior, the ruler. We who are saved by His sacrifice understand that He bought us with His blood. Because He bought us, He rightly rules us. He is our Lord, and we are glad to acknowledge that relationship by the way we live.

And so with that relationship to strengthen us, it is with joy we consider all things loss in order to gain Christ. Paul counted all else loss *in order that I may gain Christ (v.8d)*. We can burn ourselves out doing religious things and gain nothing. Or we can suffer the loss of pride, self-esteem, popularity, and self-centeredness in order to gain Christ—our Prophet, Priest and King.

One time I was trying to wire a three-way light switch. A three-way light switch allows you to turn a light on or off at one side of the room or turn the light on or off at the other side of the room. The switch has three contact screws—one black, one gold, and one single gold by itself on the opposite side of the switch. I connected the wires and the switch didn’t work. I changed the wire connections, and the switch didn’t work. Through trial and error I kept changing the wires to no avail. Finally in utter frustration I pulled up a diagram on the

internet. The solution was real simple: Connect the red wire to the single gold screw on both switches. It seemed so easy once I read the “manual.” It is a picture of people who work and work and work at trying to get right with God. But the light never comes on. Finally, we go to the Bible and discover that knowing Christ is the key. None of our sincere and wonderful religious efforts matter.

Knowing Christ and His Power Is All That Matters (vv.9-11).

What matters in life and eternity is being found having a righteousness that comes through faith in Christ alone. Paul confessed that he was glad to count all human accomplishments as loss, *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 (v.9)*. It is stated often in the Bible that a righteousness that comes through the law is of no value. In fact, such righteousness is impossible because no one is able to keep God’s law. James wrote, *For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it (James 2:10)*. There should be no doubt about this on our part. We prove this truth even in our relationship with merely the Ten Commands. Who keeps them perfectly? In all honesty, we break God’s law all the time. Therefore, no one will become righteous by keeping God’s law.

If righteousness cannot be attained by law-keeping, what is the purpose of God’s law? Paul defined that purpose by writing, *What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet” (Romans 7:7)*. God’s law proves that we all have failed to reach righteousness. God’s law leaves us all as convicted sinners. Therefore, God’s law should compel us to seek righteousness.

Many religious people ignore God’s law and are satisfied to establish their own law. Man-made religious laws look like, “Go to church, read your Bible, sing songs, do nice things for needy people, and other such nice practices.” But for most religious folks, their conscience agrees with the Bible that all of this does not make them right with God. All of that is an attempt to establish *my own righteousness*.

God is not impressed with my righteousness. In order to be right with Him, we must have a righteousness that is gained through faith. This is righteousness from God. God the Creator determines what is right and what is wrong. Only by being righteous according to His definition can we expect to get into heaven. Jesus taught, *For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven* (Matthew 5:20).

We gain the righteousness that exceeds Phariseeism through faith in Jesus Christ. That means that we depend wholly on the reality that He is God in the flesh. It means that we trust completely that His blood that He shed on the cross is the only acceptable payment to cover our offenses toward God. All of this truth rises or falls on the reality of the resurrection.

What matters is an intimate relationship with Christ. To that end, Paul expressed his desire. *That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death* (v.10). Faith in Christ is knowing Christ. Okay. What do we need to know about Christ? Notice that the basis of our faith and intimate relationship is the power of Christ's resurrection. This power undergirds and sustains all other truths about Him. If He could calm the storm, feed the thousands, and heal the sick, but could not rise from the dead, He cannot be our Savior. Rising from the dead proved that Jesus Christ is Lord over sin and death. To know the power of His resurrection is to be wholly convinced that He is the Author of life, our Creator, who has the authority to forgive sin. To know the power of the resurrection is to be absolutely sure, even beyond human wisdom, that because He rose from the grave so will everyone who trusts in Him.

That kind of faith built on the resurrection of Christ will result in sharing His sufferings. Followers of Christ throughout the ages have proved that to be intimately associated with Him is to invite scorn, mocking, abuse, and even persecution. But maybe the most difficult suffering we must deal with is dying to self. My flesh, pride, and selfish desires are so strong. It is a daily battle to remind myself that life and eternity is not about me but about the risen Savior. No one wants to die to self, but all who will rest in faith in Jesus Christ alone must die to sin and must die to self. Is it worth it?

What matters is "the" resurrection. Paul desired a righteousness that is rooted in faith in Christ's resurrection, *that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead*. To people who read and understand the Bible, there is no doubt that saints will rise again. The phrase, "by any means," refers to Paul's constant memory that he was the chief of sinners. The same is true for all of us. We are allowed to wonder at God's mercy in raising us from the dead, giving us power over death just like Christ our Savior who walked out of the tomb.

The final conclusion in this text is that "the" resurrection (that is "mine") is worth the loss of all human achievement. This is especially the case since human wisdom has not figured out how to do resurrection. Only the Author of life can give us life again. For redeemed sinners, the moment we die, our soul is forever in the presence of our Savior. At the resurrection in the last day, our soul will be reunited with our bodies and so shall we always be in that state with the Lord.

It is likely that Resurrection Sunday really is a bit farfetched in the opinion of some people. It is impossible for human wisdom to fully comprehend Jesus, the battered and crucified man, killed on the cross, laid in a tomb, and then suddenly bursting forth in a glorified body early Sunday morning. But for redeemed saints, this is the pinnacle of faith. If Christ is not risen, we have no hope of resurrection ourselves. Since we would have no hope, we would have no reason for faith. If we have no faith, we have no righteousness. If we have no righteousness, we have no eternal life. BUT now is Christ risen! Paul's instruction to the Corinthian Christians is so encouraging. *And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep* (1 Corinthians 15:17-20).