

JOY IN KNOWING GOD

Philippians 3:1-11

Good morning. It's great to be back. I'm grateful to be able to open God's word with you this week and next, and give Allen some much needed rest while on vacation with his family. We're going to cover all of ch. 3 between this week and next. So you can open your bibles to Philippians 3. And I want to start by laying out the context of this book and then we'll get into our text, but first let's pray.

Philippians is a letter written by Paul to the church in Philippi. And in it he addresses a number of different topics-his partnership and fellowship with the Phil, generosity, obedience, serving, suffering, and more. And of course the gospel. But the overarching theme of his letter is Joy. Which is surprising, because Paul wrote this letter from a prison cell after being arrested for preaching the gospel.

Joy may not be what you think of when you think of God, the church, or what it means to be a Christian. You may be surprised to know that joy is what God wants for you, joy is the purpose of all God's commands and all that He's done for you. It's a different kind of joy than the joy we're used too. But this joy is way better than the temporary, trite joys we pursue and sometimes enjoy in this world.

This joy doesn't fade, it's not circumstantial, it defies explanation and understanding. This is the joy you were made for. Everybody was made for joy, and all of us pursue joy, right? We use all our resources to get what we think will make us happy. And in general, that pursuit isn't a bad thing. Where we go wrong is not in our pursuit of joy, but in the manner and in the object of our pursuit of joy.

There's only one source of this kind of joy that can't be taken away and never fades; that endures even through the difficulties and sufferings of this life. Can you imagine having a joy that isn't contingent on your circumstances and isn't hinged on things going your way.

Paul knows this joy. Sitting in his prison cell, having given his life to advance the gospel, wants to see the kingdom of light push back the kingdom of darkness, and as he sits in chains, he writes of his joy and encourages the Philippians to rejoice as well. 16x, in this letter, Paul speaks of joy or rejoicing. See, Paul's joy was not dependent on his circumstances.

Don't you want that joy? A joy that doesn't fluctuate based on what's happening in your life, or what others think of you, or how you perceive yourself compared to others. Not a fake plastered on smile, but a deep, true joy, rooted in the immovable peace of God, that looks beyond these things for hope, to something eternal, holy, sure.

It's important to note that Paul's writing to the church/believers, and he starts out in ch. 1 talking about the importance of partnership, fellowship, and unity in the church. That we would be in unity together, standing firm on the truth of the gospel. That Jesus would be the main thing that unifies us and that everything else would flow from that as together we give our lives to honor Christ.

JOY IN KNOWING GOD

Philippians 3:1-11

But in ch. 2 we see, that only works, we only find joy in that, when we have humility toward each other. Not see ourselves as most important but preferring, looking to the needs of others, laying down our lives for each other. And then Paul paints this beautiful picture of who Jesus is and connects His example of humility and servanthood with what he's calling us to. To have the same mind, live the same way.

And in our passage today, were going to see Pauls deep desire, and his call to us, that we would Know God. That we would find our deepest joy in knowing God above all else. And there's also a warning for us about what keeps us from knowing God, what short circuits us from being able to fully know Him.

This is ultimately what the bible does. The bible shows us, in detail, who God is. Close up, far away, and every view in between. In scripture we see who God is. And then when you see Him rightly, everything else falls into place.

Now, some of us come to church and we want, 'tell me what to do' about my marriage, parenting, discouragement, put a little gas in my tank, address my needs. But the bibles says whoa, whoa, let's look at God. It's not that your marriage, kids don't matter. It just that, if you don't see God rightly and know Him personally, all the practical help in the world won't help.

So scripture says, let me tell you who Jesus is, then all this other stuff will make sense. And so that's what we want to do. I want to show you who this God is. That He's worth orienting your life around, having and knowing. With the hope that we would find that everything else pales in comparison.

Look at [Phil. 3:1-7 \(slide 3-6\)](#). The first thing we see is this theme of joy. "Rejoice in the Lord." Rejoice in Jesus! In who He is, in what He's done, in the good news of the Gospel. Some of you might be thinking, "When do we get to the practical? Why do they talk about the gospel so much and Jesus this, Jesus that. Gospel gospel gospel?" Easy, because that's what the bible does.

Paul says, to write the same thing is no trouble to me, and is safe for you. That's what you and I need. That's the kind of church you need to a part of. A church that values and never leaves the gospel and being centered on Jesus. Leaders who don't make themselves the center of attention, but remain rooted and grounded on scripture, which is always going to show you Jesus.

Paul says it's safe for you, because we forget, we drift, our affections wane. It's the truth, the gospel that holds us firm in our faith, and in unity with each other, and able to serve in humility, with Christ as our example. Not our morality, rules, religiosity. It's the same old thing, Christ and Him crucified.

And in contrast to Paul's repeat encourage to rejoice in Jesus, he says, watch out for 3 things. Look out for the dogs, evildoers, and those who mutilate the flesh. Pauls writing this letter to

JOY IN KNOWING GOD

Philippians 3:1-11

the church at Philippi, which was mostly made up of gentiles.

Before Jesus came, there were the Israelites (People of God, Jewish people), and everyone else, the gentiles. The Philippians were mostly gentiles, previously not the people of God, made the people of God through Christ, believing the gospel.

And there we're people traveling around doing damage to the gospel called Judaizers - Jewish Christians who were still holding on to Jewish tradition as a part of their grounds for salvation, and were teaching and demanding that gentile Christians, even though they believed in Christ for salvation, also needed to keep Jewish customs to be a child of God. For example, they needed to be circumcised.

And he's not soft on them. He calls them dogs. Not Lassie. Dogs weren't pets, they were stray, nasty, dangerous animals that roamed the streets and you had to watch out for them. He calls them evil doers. That's a step or two up from, we have a different theology. And mutilator of the flesh speaks to their anti-gospel agenda, looking to the physical, to address the spiritual issue of reconciliation with God.

It's not just that adding these things to the gospel message doesn't work, or doesn't work as well. It's that adding anything to the finished work of Jesus for salvation, even religious activities, is to completely neutralize the power of the gospel, or as he says in Gal. 2, nullify the grace of God. Like, this isn't a joke. This err leads you directly away from God, away from knowing Him.

And Paul addresses this straight away. He says, "We are the circumcision (the people of God) not because of any outward works, but solely because of the saving, sacrificial work of Jesus the righteous. And we worship (life given) by the spirit. All of life is worship. And we glory in Christ. Not me, Him. We put no confidence in our flesh, ourselves. Your identity, family, salvation, confidence to know God is squarely and solely found in Christ.

Most of us aren't tempted to find confidence before God in our Jewish heritage. But we have other ways that we're tempted to find our confidence and identity other than Christ. Like maybe your position (work, school); religiosity-what you do, what you know, who you know, accomplishments, bank account, alma mater/education, appearance. All of these will fail, fade, disappoint, even destroy.

And, to make the point, Paul stands up, as if to say, Ok, lets pretend circumcision matters. You think you're really something? I gotcha beat buddy. (We're not going to detail each of these out this morning,) But here's what Paul's saying, "Name a category, name a work, I'm better." But it doesn't matter. It doesn't work. It's worthless compared to the requirement of God, the righteousness of Christ

So don't put confidence in where you were born, who you are, what you do. Those things can't save you. And this works both ways. You don't get any special treatment for your race, status,

JOY IN KNOWING GOD

Philippians 3:1-11

wealth, works. It doesn't get you closer to God. Likewise, none of those things keeps you away from God. Being poor, born in an un-liked culture, sinful, normal-you're not farther away or less to God.

Pauls says, "Rejoice in Christ, look to, worship, honor, trust in Christ. Don't put any confidence in your flesh, even though I could put confidence in the flesh, for all these reasons." But, I count it all as loss, worthless, I've let it all go, humbled myself before Christ." Why? For the sake of Christ, for the worth, value of knowing Christ. Look at vs. 7-8 (slide 7).

Kent Hughes say this about Paul here, "*Paul's former accomplishments had become abhorrent to him, not because they were bad, for they were not, but because they kept him from Christ.*"

And that's the point. That the goal, the end game in Christianity is that you would Know God. And you can't know God without knowing Jesus and having Jesus. Not just knowing more about Him or being a better person. This is relational, knowing Christ personally. He says, "for the worth of knowing MY Lord."

Look at the end of vs. 8-11 (slide 8-9). Again, Paul's aim, our aim, is to know Christ. To have Him, to be found in Him. And how does that happen? Only by faith in Christ, in His righteousness, not your own. You will not get to God, or know Him, by trying to do it your way on a track parallel to His way. He says, this righteousness "Depends" on faith. There is no other way. There's only one way to know God, and that's through Christ and His righteousness.

That's Pauls passion. "Oh that I may know Him." And not just intellectually, but intimately, personally, in a way that who He is becomes who I am. That I may know Him, that I may know the power of His resurrection, and share in His sufferings, and become like Him in His death.

This is what Paul's been saying. See, what this means is that Christianity is not praying a prayer, doing some religious things and then going on with life, doing whatever we want, being led by our desires, feelings, interests, just trying to make them moral, or at least look moral. That would be more inline with the teaching of those Paul addresses as the dogs, evildoer, mutilators of the flesh.

Instead he says, I count it all loss for the sake of Christ. That I may become like Him in His death. That I too, would lay down my life, carry my cross, give up everything for the sake of His honor and the good of others. That I would share in His sufferings. That my love, trust and honor of Him would shine even as I experience loss, pain, rejection, betrayal, disappointment, all kinds of hardships with faithfulness to Him, even Joy in Him, knowing this is so temporary, even light, compared to the glories, blessing ahead.

That I may know the power of His resurrection. That just as Christ suffered and died, and was even buried, He was raised, victorious over the grave, over sin, over death. Oh that I would

JOY IN KNOWING GOD

Philippians 3:1-11

know that power. The power I've already known that's transferred me from the kingdom of darkness into His glorious light. That as I lay down my life, as I suffer, as I'm poured out, I would know His life giving, life sustaining resurrection power to fill when I'm empty, to lift when I'm down, to sustain me to the end.

But that's not even how Paul sees this. We think of death as the end, for Paul, it's a beginning, a continuation. "That by any means possible", that I would give myself to know Jesus and follow Him, becoming like Him in the way He lived, having the same mind, that that would radically alter my life... "That I may attain the resurrection from the dead."

That's where Paul's eyes are fixed. That's what he's living for everyday. And it's coming, this life is going to end. Where are your eyes fixed? What are you living for everyday? Is it for Him, with an eye toward the day when you're with Him, glorified bodies, fully sanctified like Him. That's the motivation for living what Paul's calling us to.

For those who love Him, who know Him, who've trusted in Him, that's going to be a day of rejoicing, a day of restored joy. With no sin, no suffering, no struggle to hinder our worship, we'll be with the God we know, we'll have Jesus. Amen? Amen.