

Rich Nathan  
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Philippians Series  
Philippians 3:9, 10

### ***That I May Know Him***

This morning I am going to continue with the theme that I began last week of valuing Christ above everything else. The apostle Paul says in Philippians 3:7: “Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish 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 that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings becoming like him in his death and so somehow to attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

We are going to mainly be concentrating on verses 9 and 10 in a talk that I am titling “That I Might Know Him.” But just to link today’s talk with what we were talking about last week. You know, I don’t know about you, but I find that it is a continual fight to value Christ above everything else. The fight of my values is that the best thing in life, Christ, gets replaced by lesser values that are good, but they are not Christ. So many good things in life push out the best thing. In my own life, the church and all the wonderful things that are going on in this church that I am so grateful for, the growth of the church and the fact that many, many people are making decisions to trust in Jesus for salvation through the church. And many of you are getting assistance and help in your family life and you are deciding against divorce and you deciding in favor of sexual purity. And you are deciding to give your lives to Christ in service and all the things that you are doing in terms of ministries to the poor and ministries to prisoners. You want to be influencers in your jobs. All of that, for me, often is a distraction and it gets in the way of me valuing Jesus and hearing Jesus’ voice above everything else. As a pastor, I am continually having to fight the drift of focus upon all that I see and not having that become a barrier to what is supremely valuable, namely Jesus.

I woke up a few weeks ago in the middle of the night and I had such a sense of emptiness inside. And I said to the Lord: Lord, where have you been in my life? I miss you so much. I miss hearing your voice. You are not talking to me. I am not hearing you. I haven’t valued you. I haven’t valued your voice because there have been so many other wonderful things going on.

Do you understand that you can be satisfied with lesser things and allow your thirst to be filled with something less than the best wine?

Let me give you a little shocking statement here to wake you up: G.K. Chesterton once said that the man who knocks on the door of the brothel is looking for God. Maybe you are promiscuous or struggle with your sexuality, or you have a very promiscuous

past, the truth is what is going on in terms of your sexual drivenness is that you are looking for God.

You say: Where do you get that from?

I get it from Jesus who looked into the eyes of the woman at the well who had a promiscuous past and he said to that woman: Woman, I know you are thirsty. But you are allowing your thirst to be met and satisfied by something else other than living water. Your need for connection is a real need. Your need for love is a real need, but you are not taking it far enough, all the way to letting yourself be opened up to having your need met by God and God alone.

Day by day we can either drink in the living water, that which is most satisfying, namely God, or we can meet our needs in lesser ways that keep us from really valuing Christ, those little choices. I can meet my need for a bit of satisfaction by picking up the newspaper in the morning and reading it and drinking my cup of coffee, or I can go deeper and follow my thirst all the way toward opening the Bible and spending time with the Lord and stirring myself to worship God and saying: God, I know you are the one that I really need. Not this.

The great advantages that I have in life can be put on the shelf for a little while so that I remember the ultimate advantage, namely knowing Christ, or those things can be blocks.

Well, Paul says: I make a conscious choice day by day to consider everything rubbish. The Greek word is “scubula”. It literally means: I consider everything else manure, dung, poop, because it gets in the way of really valuing Jesus who is more precious than silver.

And he says: For Christ’s sake, I have not only considered suffering everything as a loss, but in fact, I have lost everything. In Paul’s life he had to give up all of the advantages, the job, the education. He had to give it all up to follow Christ. And Paul wants us to know that in giving up all of the advantages, he wasn’t being heroic. There is nothing in Christianity that blesses and encourages altruism which is selfless giving up, giving up your wealth—Oh, aren’t you wonderful? Oh, you give a lot of money, you are a great person?

Paul says: I am not a great person to have suffered the loss of everything. I gave up tin to find diamonds. I gave up paper bags to find gold. I gave up scubula, dung—stuff that got in my way of knowing Christ.

Now any of you who give yourself as completely as possible to know Jesus cannot be losers because you are satisfying yourself with the only one who can meet your deepest needs. Christ alone can give you freedom. No human being can discover freedom by going their own way. The only thing we discover by going our own way is more bondage. So everyone who gives their life to Christ ends up being a winner.

And, of course, I am not talking about a winner in terms of this world’s lottery. And that everyone who comes to Christ will necessarily get a promotion or a great house or the perfect spouse. But if it is peace that you are looking for, if it is satisfaction that you want, if it is love that you are yearning for, if it is meaning, if you want to be useful to others, if you want freedom from a life controlling habit, if you care about having a relationship with God, if you are looking for direction in life and something worth spending your life on—then, you will value Christ.

Well, this morning we are going to take this a step further and talk about practically, in my life, how do I value Christ? And as I mentioned before, I have called today’s talk “That I Might Know Him.” Paul says [beginning in the middle of verse 8]:

“...I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ [and here is the verse that we are going to break apart now] and be found in him not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.”

Now, I want to take this verse apart because we are looking in verse 9 at the beginning point of knowing Christ. And Paul says that the beginning point of knowing Christ is righteousness by faith. Now, what does righteousness mean? It is such a key word in the Bible, but it has disappeared from normal American vocabulary. What does righteousness mean? Righteousness, very simply, means “being in the right with God.” The apostle Paul believes that it is possible for each of us to be thoroughly examined by God, to have God look right into us to see all that we are, to thoroughly examine us up and down, privately and in public, our actions and our thoughts and motives. It is possible, Paul is saying, for a person to be thoroughly examined by God and still receive a verdict from God that they are totally okay and in the right with God. Righteousness means “to secure from God a verdict of being thoroughly right.” That God would say to you: You are all that I require you to be. That even with my high standards as a holy and perfect God, who draws the line perfectly straight, you have met my standards.

God has enormously high standards and Paul says it is possible to meet God’s high standards. Paul says: I found this, in fact, this way of meeting God’s high standards, this way of being thoroughly examined by God and yet coming out with a verdict that Paul is totally righteous. And he says you can fill in the blank. This right standing with God is available to you. That I might hear from the Lord: Rich is totally righteous and has met my very highest standards.

If God was an inspector, he would stamp my forehead with his seal of approval. Grade A. Prime Cut. Absolutely perfect.

You say: Well, how can I ever hope to meet God who is perfect, who is holy, who doesn’t deviate, who doesn’t grade on a curve?

It is not as if God says, “I will move you from a failing grade to a passing grade because I will compare you with other people.” God doesn’t grade on a curve. He doesn’t compare us with other people and say, “Well, you really are nicer than Joe over there, or you give more than Cindy.” God measures people against his own awesomely high standards.

You say: How can I ever meet God’s high standards? How could God possibly look at all that I do and say, “You are perfect”?

Well, the first thing in order to gain God’s approval and to be in the right with God is to give up, totally, our attempts at do-it-yourself righteousness. The apostle Paul says in verse 9: “...And to be found in him not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law.”

I am never going to gain God’s approval with do-it-myself righteousness based on how well I can perform the various commandments that God has laid down in his Holy Word. If I am to gain the approval of God, I have to get rid of do-it-yourself methods.

I need to say a few things about do-it-yourself religion because the truth is that ever since the fall of man, that is, ever since Adam and ever since Eve sinned, human beings have been trying, on their own, to cover up their own sins. The first thing that Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden when they were caught and they had sinned, was to try to cover up by sewing together fig leaves for themselves. And ever since that time, part of the expression of human fallenness is the attempt by each one of us to come up with methods and ways of dealing on our own with our sin.

Another way to put it is that part of the fallenness of human beings is that we are all, by nature, legalists. We all believe that somehow we can get in the right with God and with our own consciences and with others on our own. Invariably, when I ask the question of someone: When you die you go to heaven and you stand before Jesus, and Jesus says, "What are you doing here?" You say, "I want to get in and be with you forever." And then I will say: Jesus looks you in the eye and says, "[Whatever your name is], why should I let you into heaven forever?"

Invariably, a person will respond to me: Well, I have tried to live a good life. I took care of my husband when he was ill. I try to be a good father. I really haven't stolen all that much. I have been a pretty good fellow or girl.

Paul says the starting point of being in the right with God is giving up all of your attempts at do-it-yourself righteousness. Let me list a few reasons why you must give up all of your attempts. Do you understand that you can never slip, not even once, if you think that you are going to maintain God's standards? And based on your performance, God will look at you and say: Okay, this man or woman is in the right with me. Do you know that you have to maintain perfection forever until you die? You can't slip up even once.

Okay, maybe you can maintain for the sake of argument, I will grant that maybe you can maintain God's perfect standard, exactly what God wants in every way, which I don't concede at all because I don't think anybody could ever meet God's standard even for a minute—a perfect love for God and perfect love for people. But, for the sake of argument, let's say you could meet God's standard for an hour, for three hours, for a whole day. Do you think that you could maintain God's perfect standards for a week and never say anything wrong? Never get irritated or angry or upset when you shouldn't? Never gossip? Always think the right thing?

Could you keep it up for a month? Could you be absolutely perfect without one slip up for a year? Or two? Until you die?

Do-it-yourself righteousness has to be maintained for a person's whole life. Because James 2 tells us that if we mess up even in one point we have violated all of the commands of God. The illustration that I like to use here is: If I had one rock and threw it, just one throw, through your living room window, how much of your window would be shattered? The whole thing.

That is the same with the law of God. The whole law of God, all of the commandments, are of one piece. They are like a big pane of glass. One law. One pane of glass. If I throw one rock, one sin, into that pane of glass, the whole thing comes crumbling to the ground. You can't slip up even once.

And do-it-yourself righteousness really is just self-conferred righteousness, isn't it? I mean every time I slip into an evaluation of how well I am doing and believing that based on that that somehow God approves of me or else, that I have somehow because of what I have been doing gained more favor with God, really all I am doing is engaging in the illusion of believing that my self-determined judgment regarding my behavior and heart is the same thing as God's judgment of my behavior.

There is a world of difference between my scrutiny of my actions and God's scrutiny. And with do-it-yourself righteousness, we mix the two things up. We think because in our minds we have been able to balance the accounts, and in our minds we have gone through this process of evaluation and rationalization and denial and all the rest of the stuff that we do that makes up feel good about ourselves, we think that is the same thing as everything being okay in God's mind. The righteousness that Paul was

concerned with was not Paul's evaluation of Paul's activity, Paul was concerned with how God would evaluate Paul's activity. What does God think?

Self-determined righteousness is not the same thing as God-determined righteousness. What we tend to do with ourselves is very much like looking over our exam papers, as students, and deciding on our own to give ourselves a 100%. Now, it really ultimately doesn't matter to the teacher what grade you give yourself. It is the teacher's judgment that matters. And just because we put smiley faces all over our conscience doesn't mean that when God looks at our motives and God looks at our speech and God looks at our activities that God is satisfied. And he will see right through those little smiley faces. And parenthetically, a lot of the self-esteem movement fails at this point. They don't understand that people need something deeper and more solid than their own thoughts about themselves - "Okay, so I think I'm okay, but what does God think, whose opinion is the only one that matters?" Self-conferred righteousness is just an illusion. It is a fantasy game that we engage in, but it is not God's approval.

And, frankly, do-it-yourself righteousness is really dishonoring to God and to God's holiness because when we believe that we can somehow do it ourselves, what we are, in essence, saying is that God's standard must be very low indeed. If I can humanly attain the perfection that God requires, then God's standards and God's high bar must be fairly low for me to be able to jump over it. Do-it-yourself righteousness dishonors God by saying: This building project is really not too big for me. I can accomplish it. This bridge between you and me God, is not all that far. There is not much of a difference between your standards and my standards.

God says: Don't you get it? The distance between me and you is so great. It is like trying to build a do-it-yourself bridge to the next galaxy.

So, to secure God's verdict on your life as you being absolutely in the right with God, as you meeting the standard, making the grade, living up to all that God requires, you must give up every form of do it yourself righteousness and performance based living. "...Not having a righteousness of my own based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ. The righteousness that comes from God."

Now, what Paul was saying is that to secure God's judgment on your life, that you have done all that God requires, the righteousness must proceed not from you, but from God. There are only two ways that the Bible describes that people can try to establish righteousness—a righteousness from us, do it yourself righteousness; or the righteousness that comes from God.

And here I want to get very basic with you because I believe that most Americans and even most American Christians don't understand the gospel. That is why we stumble over this point over and over again about feeling like I am not living up to God's standard. And this whole business of how we are constantly trying to give ourselves self-conferred righteousness. It is because we don't communicate the gospel clearly. We don't understand what the gospel message is.

The typical way that American Christians communicate the gospel message is like the Four Spiritual Laws put out by Campus Crusade which is a very good booklet and one that I have used many times. I think those booklets and methods are helpful in explaining the message. But, unfortunately, what occurs in one of these really brief presentations of the gospel message is that we end up showing up throughout the presentation. I mean if you look at the Four Spiritual Laws as just an example, and I appreciate it, I am not beating up on it, but if you look at the Four Spiritual Laws as a presentation every single law is about us.

God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life, but you have sinned. Christ came and died for you. And this is what you must do.

The difficulty with the presentation is that we must get in our minds that the gospel is not a story about us at all. It is not a story about Rich Nathan. It is not a story about Danny Meyer. It is not a Steve story. It is not a Sue story. It is not a Linda story. It is not a story about you. The gospel is a story about Jesus Christ. And you are never going to feel ultimately okay or secure unless it is clear in your mind that the gospel, the Good News, is that God has told a story not about us, but about his Son, Jesus.

If you want some proof that the gospel is a story not about me or you, but the story of Jesus, just look at the opening verses of most of the gospel accounts. You know, we have four gospels. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. And the person who's name you will find in the opening verses is the name of Jesus. You are not going to find the name of someone else and you are not going to find your own name.

So, for example, the gospel writer Mark begins his story this way: The gospel of Jesus Christ. The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ the Son of God. The gospel is about Jesus, the Son of God.

And Matthew says that he is starting off with a genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.

John says: In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.

Luke starts off talking about how he is putting together a history of the events. He is talking about the Christ events.

You don't understand the gospel, unless, immediately you say: Oh the gospel? The gospel is a story about Jesus. It is a story about somebody who was prophesied about through the centuries through Old Testament prophets. It is a story about how God fulfilled these prophecies by sending his eternal Son into the world to be born of a virgin, the Virgin Mary. It is a story of a man who grew up living a perfectly sinless life, fully expressing God's righteous character, God's perfect motivations, God's ambitions in all that he did. It is a story of a person who had the perfect view of God, the perfect view of other people, the perfect view of himself.

The gospel is the story of a person who lived a life that was the sum total of everything, that even God would even want of a life. It is a story of somebody who perfectly did and lived up to all that even God, Holy God, would ever require. And this person who did and felt and thought and was everything that even God would ever require became our substitute at the cross.

There is a word that Christians have lost from vocabulary. And that is the word "substitution." We use the word to describe a sports situation, when the coach sends someone in to replace us in a game. Now, when someone comes in as our substitute, what do we do? We stop playing. You no longer have to perform right. We sit on the bench. Now the only performance the coach cares about is not the one substituted for, but for the substitute. The Good News, the wonderfully joyful news is that somebody who perfectly did all that God requires has become my substitute and your substitute. God, in his profound love for us, has determined that Jesus about whom the gospel message is written will stand in your place when it comes to God's verdict of guilty and condemned and fallen short and not doing all that God requires. Jesus will stand in your place and bear the whole weight of the judgment of God and God's verdict regarding what your life is like.

When Jesus died on the cross, God viewed Christ as if he was you. And God poured out all of the anger as Christ stood in your place at the cross. God viewed Christ as if Christ were you. And now, this wonderful word “substitution” comes into play again when God says: Now I am going to view you as if you were Christ.

And so, God says: My Son Jesus was the Proverbs 10 “Wise son who makes his father glad all the time”. My Son Jesus makes me totally happy. My Son Jesus has lived up to all that even I require and my standards are perfect standards. And now, I view you the same way that I view my Son Jesus, as if you were Jesus living a perfectly obedient life, having perfect motives, having a perfectly clean conscience, a totally right view of God and others and yourself. God has decided to take all of the righteousness that belonged to Jesus and place it in your account. Christ is treated by God like us and we are treated by God like Christ.

Brothers and Sisters, I am convinced that we need to be told this story over and over again because we don’t understand that the gospel is a Christ story. It is about him. The reason the verdict of God can be on our lives as you meet all that God requires is because God is looking at the performance of Christ and not your performance. Christ has gone into the game for us. We sit down. The conscience of Christ, the motives of Christ, the ambitions of Christ, the love of Christ and not your ambitions, motives, conscience.

The way you get attached to this wonderful good news, Paul says, is by faith. “The righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.”

Now, Christians talk so much about faith and the need for faith that many people who are not yet Christian begin to think that people are saved on account of their faith. People say: Well, I hear what you are saying in terms of securing God’s verdict on my life and being in the right with God. Having God see me as meeting all of his requirements, even the very highest requirements. And the person might say: I would love to become a Christian, but you know what my hang-up is? I don’t seem to have enough faith. I wish I had the faith.

Have you ever heard that? You know, you might feel that, in fact, today. And I have heard people regularly say to me: Well, I wish that I had the faith that you do because I would like to be a Christians. I can see that Christians really do have better lives. And I like what I see. But I just don’t have the faith.

Now somewhere along the line the person who says: I don’t have enough faith. I wish I had your faith—has gotten the idea and maybe they have gotten the idea from you, that people are saved and secure the verdict of being in the right of God on account of their faith. I want you to hear this real clearly and I am going to go back over it again so that you understand what I am saying: People are not viewed as being in the right with God on account of their faith. People are viewed as being in the right with God on account of Christ and his performance as our substitute.

See, to say that people are viewed as being in the right with God and secure that wonderful verdict of you have done everything that even God should require and does require, on account of their faith is like saying—and this is what I think is in people’s minds—that God looks at an individual and says: Wow! Look at that faith. You know, I require seven grams of faith in order to be in the right with me and that person has nine grams of faith. Now, you over there, you will never be acceptable to me because you only have one gram of faith. You don’t have enough faith cells.

That is the way people think about this. Some people have enough faith cells and they are able to believe, but poor me, whatever part of the brain that faith cells are in, I

just don't have enough of those. I wish I did, but I don't. I have a university education, I have been trained in science and I have read all these secular books. My upbringing was not in a Christian home. I was raised as a Jew or a Muslim or atheistic or Roman Catholic or Protestant or whatever and I just don't have enough faith.

If that in any way approximates what you have thought, then you haven't thought about where faith fits into this whole business of securing the verdict of Christ in a biblical way. Never, ever say: I don't have enough faith. Because if you say that you don't get what faith is. You don't get it at all. Faith is just an instrument. It is just a channel by which God's righteousness becomes ours. We are not saved on account of faith.

We are saved on account of Christ. What saved us is the Lord Jesus Christ. The story is about Jesus Christ, it is not about you. It is not about your faith. It is the death of Christ that saves us. It is the prayers of Christ before the throne that secures us. It is the righteous life of Christ, the perfect blood of Christ, his being nailed to the cross, his resurrection.

Where does faith come in? Well, where it comes in is that everyone has faith. It is not that some people have seven grams of faith and you have none because of your wiring or because of your rationalism, or the way your brain works. Everyone has faith. The only question for you as a human being is what are you going to put your faith in to secure for yourself a good life? A purposeful life? A meaningful life? And to secure for yourself a right relationship with God? What are you going to put your faith in?

You, currently, are relying on, perhaps, what Paul says is confidence in the flesh. That the way you live to secure for yourself a good life is your intelligence or your street-smarts, or your training, or your niceness, or your ability to work hard, or your looks, or whatever it your self-produced thing. That is what you are relying on to be happy in life and to gain God's approval. Paul says: Stop relying on those things and start relying on Christ, that's all.

Instead of putting faith in you, which is what you do, put your faith in Christ. Rest on Christ and trust that Christ is enough to secure a relationship with God.

Now, having meditated on Christ and how the whole gospel message is about Christ and what I need to do is to rely on Christ and to rest in Christ, Paul goes on and says: Now that my mind is just full of the message about him, I want to go on to know him. Verse 10 summarizes the Christian life so wonderfully. Paul says: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his suffering, becoming like him in his death."

The gospel message is a story of Christ and how Christ is supremely valuable. Now, Paul says I want to go on and know this Christ. Now, it is interesting the way that Paul phrases it: That I might know him. There are two things that the apostle Paul is expressing in this little phrase "that I might know him". For those of you who are Greek maniacs, the verb tense is the ingressive aorist. Literally, it means something like: That I might come to know Christ. As an initial matter, that I might begin to know Christ. Now that I have talked about this Christ, oh, that I might begin to know him. Oh, that I might start off knowing him.

And then the apostle Paul is also trying to express a different thought. Not only may I just begin to know him, but may I deepen my knowledge of him? May I go on to grow in the knowledge of Christ?



Let me talk briefly about both of those thoughts. Here is a man who has known Jesus and known the gospel message that it is about Christ for 23 years at least. Then he says surprisingly: Oh, that I might start to know him.

What does the apostle Paul possibly mean by having known Christ for so long, oh that I might start to know him. That I might know him, again, as an initial matter?

I think what Paul is saying is: Oh that I might have back in my life that initial romance, that freshness of knowing Christ that was there at the beginning. May I know that, again, today?

If I can use an analogy here and compare our relationship with Jesus as being like the relationship of a man and a woman that exists in most marriages. In most married people's lives there was, at the beginning, an initial romance. There was a falling in love, a passion, an intense, hot desire for each other, a yearning, a longing. I remember the first time that I held Marlene on the dance floor on our first date. The first time I touched her. Literally, I heard bells. There is a wonder, there is a freshness in young love. Young love drives out all other thoughts. You don't study; you don't sleep; you have one obsession. And I think Paul is eluding to that quality of freshness and life that I see in many young believers. And Jesus talks about this freshness, this life, this zest as being like new wine. It has a bite to it. It has an edge to it. It has some bubble, some full-bodied thing.

Do you know what happens, often, over a period of time? The zest, the thrill, the bite, the excitement, the freshness goes out of our marriages, right? And it just the same-old, same-old, what did you do at work today, pick up the kids, I won't be home for dinner, same laundry, same underwear, having the same person in the bed next to you. It is so important, married couples, to rekindle that love that you had at first. The Bible talks about this. This isn't some modern romantic frivolous stuff dreamed up by some brand new self-help book. For 3000 years the Bible has talked about this with older married couples. It tells husbands who are drifting, husbands who are not communicating, remember the wife of your youth, especially when things are going a bit sour and stale. You can look that up in the book of Malachi 2 and Proverbs 5:18. If it has been awhile since you have felt any new wine in your marriage, I would encourage you to do something romantic together. Something to light the fire. There was a time you were in love; how about revisiting that? You used to hold hands. How about rekindling the romance this next month.

The Bible tells us that the same thing that applies to old married couples, applies to old believers in Jesus. It is possible as you go on with Christ to have it be same-old, same-old – same Kinship, same Sunday morning. If you look at Revelation 2 as it speaks to the church at Ephesus, it talks to the Ephesians believers and says: I know you have been faithful. You have worked hard. You have ministered. You have done all the right things, church, but I have this against you, [Jesus says] you have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen and return and do the things that you did at first.

Here is what I am saying: There is a profound reality in knowing Jesus that much of the deepening of the knowledge of Jesus is really returning to square one over and over again. To remembering and rekindling those initial moments of the passion and the wonder of the forgiveness of sins. Of the incredible awe that you could know God. That there really was a God and that that God loved you. That you were born again, not by your own activity, but by the love and mercy of God.

So let me ask you a question: How fresh and alive is your relationship right now with Jesus? How hot is it? If I can use that word. How hot is your relationship with Jesus? Would you describe your relationship this week with Christ as being like hot bread that just came out of the oven? You know, it fills the room with the aroma of freshly baked bread—is that what your relationship with Christ has been like this week, full of aroma and warmth? Or would you describe it like week-old bread that has been sitting on the counter all week that you couldn't cut unless you had a chain saw? Do you need a chisel to break into your heart?

Do you know I think there are two things that really rip us off from that rekindling and returning. One of them is not understanding that knowing Jesus is supposed to be a romantic and passionate and heart-felt thing. You know, there are some things that get in the way of knowing Christ at this kind of fresh, hot level. One of the cheap substitutes for intimate relationship with Christ that some people have, unfortunately, bought is an almost entirely intellectual knowledge of Christ. When Paul says: That I might know him, he is not simply saying: That I might be able to debate about Christ theologically. That I might have precision in my articulation in the doctrine of Christ.

Now, listen to me. I believe in training people in sound theology, particularly if you are ever going to be a teacher. You need to understand what the truth is and what is not the truth. You need to be able to articulate it. You need to understand the arguments. But the knowledge of Christ goes beyond that. The knowledge of Christ that Paul is talking about is not just theological, it is not just intellectual. It is relational, it is intimate. The word “know” in the Bible is actually used of the intimate, romantic, sexual relationship between a husband and his wife. Adam knew his wife. Adam had intercourse with his wife.

And Paul is talking about that in this rekindling of that fresh relationship with Jesus when he says: Oh, that I might know him. That I might have intimacy, depth of heart communion with Christ. That I might be my beloved's and he would be mine.

And don't let the cold, sterile intellectualizers of the faith rob you of relationship and intimacy and experience. Let them make fun of your experience. Love is supposed to be felt. Some of you have been ripped off because you have allowed an intellectual knowledge of Christ to substitute for a relationship, an intimacy. Others of you have been ripped off because you have substituted doing for Christ for that knowing and deep relationship with Christ. You don't rekindle romance, you don't have freshness, if relationship has been replaced by doing.

In my home, I can't say that I have an alive relationship with Marlene if the only basis Marlene and I are relating to one another on is what we do for each other. Well, Marlene, I don't really need to communicate with you. I bring home the pay check, isn't that enough? Why are you upset? I shoveled the driveway and swept the garage, what else could a wife want?

How many wives are starved for communication? Longing for intimacy? And their husbands are substituting doing for them. How many children are longing for communication and parents are doing for them? I don't want more things, Dad; I'd appreciate spending an evening with you!

Doing for Christ is not the same thing as knowing Christ intimately and freshly. There is a fresh relationship with Jesus that the Lord wants to bring us into. Also, he wants to bring us into a deep knowing of Christ. It is not just going back to square one, but also a growing marriage has a depth to it and an understanding and flowing together that no young married would ever know. Do you know Christ freshly?

And then Paul is asking do you know Christ deeply? Have you explored Christ so that you know him deeply? Do you know Christ as your friend? Someone you can just talk to at any time and who will provide you with companionship and help and council and comfort? Someone you can walk with and enjoy? Do you know him as a friend?

Do you know Christ as a counselor? Do you know him as your rescuer? As your Savior? As your Protector? Just as a marriage can deepen so that young love can't touch what you now have, so a relationship with Christ can deepen. There can be dimensions of Christ's person that you never knew, that you never understood, but that you now see.

I want to finish with just a couple of things that we may wish to know about Christ as we press into this wonderful knowing of Christ. Paul says: "...That I might know him and the power of his resurrection." There are two ways to consider this. Paul may be saying: I want to know Christ in the power of his resurrection. I want to know Jesus not as some historical figure in this long ago storybook Bible. "Long ago and far away...there lived a carpenter's son named Jesus." This is the way many children grow up learning about Jesus. That Jesus is in the realm of fairy tales. Jesus exists so far away, he is in the mist, in the foggy past. He is like one of those figures in history that maybe existed and maybe didn't. Kind of like King Arthur or Robin Hood. There is some evidence, but it is really hard and it is all real shadowy. Who cares anyway? The story is great. But he has long ago passed from the earth.

Paul says: I don't want to know Christ that way. Long ago and far away in a distant land. I want to know the living Christ today. "In the power of the resurrection..."

In other words, I want to know Christ as my alive Savior. I want to know Jesus as the great "I Am" today, not the great "I Was" who lived 2000 years ago. The ever-living Lord, the one who says: I am with you now, this moment in this room, and I will be with you even to the close of the age.

And I want to know him and the power of his resurrection. To know the power of Christ's resurrection means to know Christ so well and his risen power that no matter what situation you are in today you say: But Christ can overcome this. Knowing the power of the resurrection is knowing the great reality that no matter what problem I release to Christ, Christ can overcome it. The power of the resurrection means that Christ overcame the biggest problem that people have—dying. He over-powered the biggest bully, the greatest enemy. The one thing that no amount of human ingenuity, no amount of human can-do, self-assertiveness stuff could ever beat—death.

Knowing the power of the resurrection means, then, that Christ can always bring life to dead things. Is there something dead that you need life brought back into? I talked about marriage before. The power of the resurrection means that Christ can breathe life and bring life out of the dead, cold ashes that you said are completely crushed out, snuffed out, water all over it, Christ can bring cold marriages back to life.

Christ can revive a dead friendship, a violated relationship. You say: Well, I feel so cold inside, so empty, so numb—Christ can bring back dead emotions. He can bring back that dead relationship with God that long-ago stopped.

The power of the resurrection means that there is nothing that is hopeless. You say: No way. Impossible, this cannot change. This cannot be revived. This can't be renewed. Christ can do it. He has the power of the resurrection. And I am not talking to you about escapism. A lot of people believe that Christians are escapist. They are not facing the facts. Our marriage is dead, face the facts. This situation is hopeless, face the facts. You can never be whole inside, face the facts. You are too beaten up. You are too traumatized, you will never be a success, face the facts.

Christianity is not escapism. Christianity says: I will face the facts. True Christians face the facts, but they face all the facts, not only the fact about my marriage, or my emotions, or about this relationship, or my career, or about whatever I am going through that is so hard. Facing all the facts means that I will add to those facts the power of the resurrection.

It is the non-Christian and the doubter and the atheist who doesn't face the facts. Because one fact they never take into account is the fact of the resurrection. Do you take account of the resurrection when you throw up your hands and say: This can't work? How can you give up on your marriage and say: This can't work? Didn't Christ rise from the dead? How can you give up on your child and say: Hopeless, helpless? Didn't Jesus push a stone away? How can you give up on yourself and say, "I am what my parents always said I was – a loser, a failure. I always blow it and always will blow it."? Don't you understand that Christ the corpse who stood up?

When you are doing your calculations about any situation you are in, make sure you factor in the fact of the resurrection before you total it up and come up with your answer.

Paul, finally, says: I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings.

Oh, I must add that right away. I never want you to hear in this church the kind of message that so many people have been handed. The message that many people get is that if you come to Christ all of your problems will go away. You will never struggle with anything again. You just come to Jesus and it will be all goodness and light and you will be skipping and happy all the day. People get that kind of message and they think: Okay, I will become a Christian and everything will be really great. My whole life will change and I will never have a problem again. That romance that I have wanted as a single person or unhappy married will be mine immediately and my job will be easy and everything is going to go great. And then when everything is not great, Satan comes along and says two things to people and he says these two things over and over again. The devil comes along when things are not so great and you are meeting opposition at work, the relationship that you were counting on and you said: God is going to give this to me and he didn't give it to you, you are really struggling again with the same old sins that you thought: Oh, I will become a Christian and those sins will go away and they haven't—Satan comes along and says two things: Number one, he says: Let me accuse you. You are not a Christian. If you were a Christian everything would be going good. You are just a big fake. The reason things are not going good is because you are not a very good Christian. Maybe you are not even a Christian. Or if you are a Christian, well you are one of those least favored children, the kid in the home, the black sheep, it is other people who are loved more by God than you. You are a child of God, but you have the cheap seats. You are not a Christian like the man or woman over there. Now God really loves them, but you are just too defective to be really loved.

Satan comes along and accuses you – You are not a Christian, or if you are you're not a good one – and, then, Satan comes along and accuses God. Always the same two things. He comes along and he says: And by the way, you knew this thing was too good to be true. God's promises aren't true. You were afraid they wouldn't be true and they are not. It is all just as you thought, a big fairy tale. Just people's fondest wishes. But the reason things are going so hard is that it is just not true. There is nothing to this business of the power of his resurrection.

He will accuse you, he will accuse God, either or, both and. He does the same thing over and over and over throughout people's Christian lives. And we fall for the same tricks over and over and over because we are gullible and stupid.

And Paul says: Oh, that I might know the fellowship of his sufferings. What is he saying? Why would a Christian want to know the fellowship of his sufferings? Paul is saying: Oh, foolish Christian, don't ever let suffering make you think that you don't know Jesus and that Jesus doesn't know you. That God's promises aren't true. Foolish Christian, don't let the enemy get you down over and over again every time you face a trial. Don't fall for the same old tricks. Don't be conned again. Understand some things about suffering. Understand that if you are suffering for Christ, you are getting opposition, people laugh at you, people snicker, you have been fired because you are a Christian, you have lost friends at school because you are a believer, you haven't been able to make the money that somebody else on your job does because you won't lie—understand that if you are suffering as a Christian you are suffering with Christ.

It is the lot of a Christian to share the same fate as Jesus. We are talking substitution now, we are talking identification. He takes our life, we take his life, we take his whole life including the suffering part. The world hated him, they will hate us. If you suffer for Christ, that means that you are exactly what you ought to be—identified with Jesus. Suffering for Christ is not a cause for concern, it is a cause for rejoicing. Yes. It is proof to me, it is evidence to my soul that I am who Jesus says I am: One of his real children. That is what the apostles always thought: We're suffering for Christ, yea! Not because I like to suffer and not because I am some sort of masochist, but yea! it proves that I really am a child of God. Boy, I am doing better than I thought. That is why Satan has come after me. I talked with John Wimber's wife a couple of weeks ago. Many of you heard John suffered a minor stroke – pray for him. Carol and I were joking on the phone and she said, "Well Rich, either we're doing something horribly wrong, or maybe, just maybe, we're doing something really right." I thought I was kind of really unimportant to the kingdom, but hey, Satan wouldn't be working so hard if I were unimportant.

And suffering for Christ means that Christ must be preparing me for something really big. When you go through trials, you say to yourself: Boy, God must have some really, really big in store because he is working awfully hard to knock off the rough edges in my life. He wouldn't be putting me through all the preparation unless he had in store for me something incredibly wonderful.

And what he has in store for you is glory. What he has in store for you is you reflecting Christ. Brothers and Sisters, the highest and best thing that you can ever attain to is knowing Christ Jesus. And to know him is to know him freshly, to know him deeply, to know him and his overcoming power and it is also to walk out in your own life the fellowship of his sufferings.

Let's pray.