

The Prize Above All Else

TRANSCRIPT (AUTO-GENERATED)

Who do you think you are? Who are you? Where are you from?

When you're at a party and someone says, so tell me about yourself, what do you say? Your name, job, number of kids you have, if you're married, educational status, who do you think you are?

When I'm asked that question and I say, when they say like, oh, so what do you do? And I say, I work for a church, the conversation goes silent every time, like a way to kill a conversation. But who are you?

Who do you think you are? One more question. If you were to die tomorrow and stand before the pearly white gates of heaven and an angel was to ask you, why should we let you into heaven?

What would you say? On what basis do you have any confidence that you could enter the kingdom of heaven? This is a tough but a fun question to look at today.

I believe our passage in Philippians is going to speak to that. On the day we die and stand before those gates, I believe that those who believe in Jesus would say, when the angel says to us, why should we let you in?

We would stand back and say, it's not me, it's Jesus, right? Jesus is the answer to the question. But do we live today and tomorrow as though our only hope, our only righteousness is Jesus and not put any confidence in the flesh?

That's the question that we're entering into today. So let me pray. Father, as we come to your word, we just hold it very highly.

It is the authority for our life.

So I pray you would speak to us, your church, into our context that we would be taught and rebuked and corrected and trained in righteousness for your glory and help me to get out of the way of the work you want to do. In Jesus' name. Amen.

This is message number 6 in our Philippians series. I encourage you, if you have a Bible, there's nothing like having a real Bible in church and being able to follow through as we work through the sermon. So pull out your Bibles if you haven't.

Philippians 3. We've had different sermons in the morning and night. So if you don't listen to the podcast or go back and listen, watch the services, you're only getting half the picture.

So I encourage you to go back and listen to the rest of the sermons to get the full picture of Philippians. We talked earlier in this series that the thesis statement of Philippians is Philippians 1.27. If you had your Bibles, you could flip to it.

It says this, whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ. Philippians is not a book that is trying to get us to think theologically correctly.

It is about how you actually pragmatically live the Gospel, conducting ourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ. Last week, Jonathan unpacked Philippians 2 and verses 12 to 18.

There's a call on our lives, the life of every Christian to stand out like stars in the sky. It says to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, and without grumbling or arguing.

And to your credit, NorthernLife, I've had probably a dozen conversations with people who would be just talking about life, and then they'd say, Oh, I'm grumbling, I'm sorry, sorry Lord, help me. So well done for taking that word to heart.

The next section of Philippians was really weird.

We didn't actually do a sermon on it, because we did the same sermon last week morning and night, but it's like all this historical contextual stuff about Timothy and Epaphroditus, who are Paul's co-workers in the gospel.

When you read it, it feels like you're holding your breath for 10 minutes. But finally, we come up again for air, Philippians chapter 3 and verse 1, which Lockie read out for us.

Our passage, Philippians 3.1, begins with a call to beware the false teachers of a false gospel that was infiltrating the church at Philippi. The book of Philippians is actually the letter to the Philippians.

And as a letter, it means that there is a relational context where Paul knows the Philippians and the Philippians know him. And so he writes this letter to them. And he is addressing specific issues that the Philippian church are dealing with.

And the issue that they are dealing with here in this passage is that people are teaching the wrong thing. And Paul has to straighten them out. Philippians 3, 1 to 2 says, Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord.

It's no trouble for me to write these things, write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.

Paul has already spoken about this matter with the Philippians, whether in person when he was actually at Philippi, or by a letter that we don't have.

Paul has spoken about this topic, but he says, there's no harm in me telling you again the truth of the gospel, that we might fight those who teach a false gospel, because repetition rewires the brain, or the brain.

Philippians 3 verse 2, watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh, for it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by His Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh.

And now we start to get to the guts of the issue that Paul is addressing for the Philippians.

There are certain people within the Philippian Church who are teaching that for a Gentile, that's a non-Jew, to become saved, they must become a Jew first, and then a Christian. So Paul writes this passage to specifically address that false teaching.

This is such a key point in understanding this passage, that we have to do sort of a history lesson, sort of a flashback to get the run up. So, without further ado. The people of Israel.

Abraham's big family believed in one God. This one God wanted to be in a relationship with the people of Israel, called a covenant.

A covenant is like a marriage, where both parties promise to be faithful to the conditions of the covenant, and then they will enjoy the benefits of the covenant.

And just like the wedding ring is the sign of marriage, there was a sign of the covenant. Circumcision.

Circumcision was this access card that could make you a Jew, so that even if you were a foreigner, a Gentile, a non-Jew, you could go through the process of circumcision, and you could enter into the people of God. Now, flush forward to Jesus.

Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, who fulfills all the promises and expectations of the Jewish Old Testament. He lives, dies and rises again around Judea, in the Jewish promised land.

And in the Gospel, he offers a relationship with the one God of Israel, to all people who would put their faith in his atoning work. And in that way, Jesus fulfills the conditions of the covenant, so that we can enjoy the benefits of the covenant.

My point is, it's Jewish. It's very Jewish. The very first believers were Jews.

The Book of Acts tells us that the Gospel spread starting in Jerusalem, then Judea, Samaria, and finally it spread to the ends of the world. But here, the early church encountered a problem.

As the Gospel goes to the Gentiles, how does it relate to them with the Jewishness of the Gospel? How does the Jewish Gospel land in the hands of the Gentiles?

For instance, the specific question is, do Gentiles need to be circumcised in order to be saved? That is the question.

In response to this question, the early church called a council together, it's like some Lord of the Rings thing, called the Council of Jerusalem, which is recorded in Acts 15, and all of our favorite heroes of the New Testament are there, Paul,

Peter, James and others. And they decide at the council, you do not have to be circumcised in order to become a part of the people of God in order to be saved. The sign of the covenant is no longer circumcision, but the Holy Spirit.

And because it's the Holy Spirit, Jew and Gentile alike can be together, the people of God saved by grace through faith. Circumcision is not necessary, the council decided.

And yet, as Paul spreads the gospel and he's planting churches around the Mediterranean, these people who are teaching circumcision is necessary, who Paul calls Judeaizes, as in to make something Jewish is to Judeaize.

Paul calls them Judeaizes who are constantly cutting in on his churches and telling the Gentiles they must be circumcised in order to be saved. So we see it in a number of the books of the New Testament. Paul is addressing this issue.

Galatians, for instance, is written specifically to address the problem of the Jew-Gentile fusion into the people of God. And the Philippian Church is facing exactly this problem, too.

Flashback over, cut to the present day, from verse 2, watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision. Notice the Jewish language.

We who serve God by His Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus and who put no confidence in the flesh. So now we understand mutilators of the flesh, right? This is a very real thing that the Philippians are facing.

This is an urgent threat to the gospel that Paul is addressing. To address them in verse 2, he calls the Judaizers three things. Firstly, dogs, which is ironic because the Jews used to call Gentiles dogs.

And now here's Paul saying, you Jews, in fact, you Jewish Jews, you're so Jewish, you want to Judaize other people, you are the real dogs.

Secondly, he calls them evildoers, which is ironic because prior to Jesus, these people are doing the exact right thing in calling for circumcision to become a part of the people of Israel.

But now, because of the work of Jesus on the cross, by grace through faith, salvation is made available to all people without needing to be circumcised. And so the Judaizers are evildoers. And thirdly, they are mutilators of the flesh.

Paul uses a bit of wordplay here. The word behind mutilators is *catatome*. And the word for circumcision is *peritome*.

Peritome means to cut around, and *catatome* means to cut into little pieces. It's brutally vivid language when you think about it, so maybe don't think about it. But it reminds me of Galatians 5.12.

Paul makes the point that these Judaizers, who insist that circumcision is necessary, he wishes they would go all the way and cut the whole thing off. Okay, I bet you didn't think we'd be talking about this this morning.

Thankfully, Paul's got it all out of his system. In verse 3, he begins to make a comparison between him and the Philippian Church and the Judaizers.

In effect, he's saying that the Philippians in him, that's the we, we are the ones with the true gospel. We are the ones who are truly the people of God, marked by the true sign of the Covenant, which is the Holy Spirit and not circumcision anymore.

Furthermore, it is we or they who boast in Christ Jesus alone and put no confidence in the flesh as the means of their standing before God with righteousness.

So while the Judaizers hold up the physical flesh-based external kind of righteousness, Paul says, we put no confidence in the flesh, even though he could. He could put confidence in the flesh. And that moves us to the second half of verse 3.

And following, which I think is a very interesting part of the passage, where Paul begins to explore hypothetically what it would look like if he was to put confidence in the flesh.

Verse 3b says, we put no confidence in the flesh though I myself, that's Paul, have reasons for such confidence. And it gives seven reasons. If someone else thinks they have reason to put confidence in the flesh, I have more.

Circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, in regard to the law of Pharisee, as for zeal, persecuting the church, as for righteousness, based on the law, faultless.

Seven reasons why Paul, based on who he is and what he has done, can stand before God with total confidence. Number one, the first four are things that are just like his by birth. He didn't do anything to earn them.

Number one, he was circumcised at the perfect time required by the law. Number two, he can trace his family line all the way back to Abraham. So he is a true Jew.

Number three, he's from the tribe of Benjamin, great name, which is the tribe of the very first king of Israel, and one of the only two tribes that stayed faithful. And fourthly, he speaks the true language of the people of God, which is Hebrew.

And then Paul gives three more reasons, and these reasons are based on things he's done. He says firstly, well, fifthly, if we're keeping the tally, he was so devoted to the law that he was a Pharisee. That's like almost the top level you can be.

Number six, he was so passionate and on fire that he was persecuting the church.

And number seven, he was faultless before the law, which doesn't mean he was perfect and sinless, but that he had done all the steps required by the law to stand before God faultless.

Seven reasons that Paul could have used to stand before God and ask him to do something on his behalf, to gain a righteousness and a relationship before God.

Effectively, Paul is saying, you Judaizers who think that the flesh and the external matters to God, you cannot beat me. I am top shelf Jew. I am righteous and zealous and passionate for the gospel.

If you want to make the marker of your relationship before God physical and external, you cannot beat me. Paul says, I've done everything right. I'm as close to God as you could possibly be.

But then in verse seven, this crashing realization, Paul comes to that God doesn't work like that. He doesn't look at those things.

That this monumental skyscraper of achievement that Paul has built doesn't count for anything because it's built on the wrong foundation. And no matter how high Paul climbs this ladder of external flesh based qualities, it will not lead him to God.

And so Paul can say in verse seven, whatever were gains to me, these are the seven reasons he's given, whatever I once thought helped me before God, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage.

The Greek word is almost a swear word, garbage 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 is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of

faith. Paul has realized in this immense moment, there is not a single thing in the universe that he could stand on that would get him closer to God.

In fact, everything that he would try and put beneath his feet, every step he would take in an external righteousness is a step away from God. It is a loss, not a gain.

Because every step up this ladder of self-accomplishment is one step away from the ground at the foot of the cross, where grace that doesn't matter what you've done or what you've said meets you at the foot of the cross and forgives you and brings

you into relationship with God. That's how God works. So don't get circumcised. It doesn't help.

And I know you're not booking an appointment for Tuesday morning to get circumcised. I know that.

But I think today, I, I'll speak for myself, I build scaffolds of achievement and works that I hold before God in the morning and say, God, are you going to do something for me today? Look how good I am.

Instead, Paul says, whatever gains to me is a loss compared to knowing Christ. Circumcision and any external religious righteousness is a loss.

I'm confident that if we died tomorrow, we would say when the angel asks us, why should we let you into heaven? We would stand back and we'd say, it's Jesus. It's not me.

I've done nothing. It's Jesus. The angel would let us in.

But do we live today, tomorrow, with that same posture that I have nothing apart from the Lord? I have nothing of any gain apart from what I know in Christ. I don't live that way.

I don't wake up in the morning with that mindset. But that's what Paul is telling us to do. He considers everything in this world a loss compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus, Christ, my Lord.

Interesting, this is the only time in the New Testament where Paul says, Christ Jesus, my Lord. Every other time, he says, Christ Jesus, our Lord. Because he's stressing the communal nature.

But right now, he is saying, there is nothing that compares in my life to having a personal, living, active relationship to know Jesus. Nothing compares. Have you considered loss everything of this world compared to knowing Christ?

The Greek word behind this considered is in a tense, which means like a past action that has a present continuous effect. What that means is there was a day, a moment, a reckoning where Paul said, you know what? I've seen the face of Jesus.

And as one of my favorite songs says, the things of earth grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace. Paul considered in one moment everything he had in this world, a loss compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus.

He doesn't even say the life that Jesus gives or the joy or the peace, but knowing Jesus is the treasure in the field, the pearl beyond worth, the prize above all else.

And so he considers it garbage, garbage, everything else that would take him away from knowing Jesus Christ as his Lord. Paul knows that on the day he dies and stands before the Lord, he will not plead his own righteousness but that of Jesus.

But he also knows, he has decided, he decided one day and it is still in effect, and it will always be in effect, he considers all things a loss, garbage, if he can't know Christ. To know Christ is the treasure of the universe.

There is nothing that comes close. And so Paul puts before you and I an invitation today. Today, jump, jump off the ladder of your self-achievement that you and I build.

Jump off and consider it loss. And land in the ground at the foot of the cross. And there you will find Jesus.

You will find grace. You will know Jesus. Consider, consider everything a loss.

Decide, decide the things of your life don't mean a single thing if they stop you from knowing Jesus Christ as your Lord. The Gospel, specifically knowing Jesus, is the treasure in the field. And the greatest prize in all of this world.

And we live in a cultural moment that wants to reduce Christianity or engagement with Christianity to once a month on a Sunday. And a half-hearted, apathetic, ho-hum, like so-so kind of faith, it doesn't get your heart beating.

Paul says the exact opposite. He says that there is nothing in the world, I know I'm repeating myself, but I'm trying to hit you on the head with this, from the Word as it's done to me this week.

Nothing else matters in all the world apart from knowing Christ. And that creates a beating heart of faith, of passion, passionate love for the Lord and a desire to know Him better because there is no better thing in this world.

There is no better thing in this world than to know Jesus. In my life, I think I've seen a tiny glimpse of what it is to know Jesus.

And even as I seek to know Him more for the rest of my life, I'm prepared today to consider all things lost compared to what I've seen, and I haven't seen anything yet. Will we consider all things a loss?

Compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ as Lord? What does it look like to make that decision? To consider everything a loss compared to knowing Jesus?

You tell me. I'd love to know. I don't know how, really, and this is the part that I always struggle with, these messages.

But I'm going to wake up tomorrow and want to know Christ better. And as I reach out, James 4 verse 8 says, draw near to God and He will draw near to you. You can know Christ better if you want to.

He wants to be known by you. And if you don't know Christ this morning, He is the treasure of all the world, the pearl beyond worth. And there is nothing in this world that compares to knowing Him.

And you can know Him now. You can know Him. And in that moment, you will see His face on the cross as He loves you and gives His life to pay for your sin.

And the things of earth will grow strangely dim as you fix your eyes on the face of Jesus of His glory and grace. There is nothing that compares to knowing Jesus Christ as Lord.

And so we consider all things a loss, compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus as Lord. The COVID pandemic was certainly a time when we lost a lot that seemed like gain. Loss of jobs and time and relationship and life sometimes.

It was really a time marked by a lot of loss. And at this church, we recorded some worship songs online. And this song that we're about to play was recorded in the heart of COVID, in the midst of like a lot of the world falling apart.

But even though it was recorded at a very specific time in history, and in the history of this, the world, even as this global pandemic has affected us, it speaks to a timeless truth that was true for Paul 2,000 years ago.

And it's true for us today that there is nothing that compares to knowing Jesus Christ. That we would consider all things loss compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Him. I have to apologize for how much of me you're seeing today.

Really, it's not my heart. I don't want it to be this way, but it has worked out this way.

But I pray that this song might move you, move you to believe again for the first time or just again that there is nothing that compares to the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus.

So that we could be people who don't just on the day we die, plead the righteousness of Christ, but today and tomorrow and every day, we consider all things a loss compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus.

So we're going to listen to this song.

I want to know Christ, yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so somehow attaining to the resurrection from the dead.