

Philippians 3:1-11

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Date: 10 October 2014

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[0 : 00] So we're going through the letter for the Philippians in this autumn. We come to 3, 1 to 11 with Stuart.

! That's just read to us. Philippians 3, 1 to 11. There are many things that are hard to believe, aren't there? Apparently in Italy, for around £3,500, you can buy ready-made coffins that have alarms, two-way speakers, a torch, a small oxygen tank, and a sensor to detect a person's heartbeat just in case. £3,500 well spent.

There's a law in the statute books in Oklahoma which forbids giving alcohol to fish. It's very difficult to believe, isn't it? In 1664, in 1785, in 1860, a passenger ferry sank while crossing the Menai Straits off North Wales.

Amazingly, each disaster happened on the 5th of December, and the only survivor on each occasion was a person called Hugh Williams. It's true. Unlikely things happen, aren't they?

And the matters that Paul writes about to the Philippians at this lunchtime that we're looking at, they seem to us unlikely. What Paul says about knowing the Lord Jesus, and what it is to know Christ, I don't know about you, but at times it feels so unlikely.

[1 : 29] And what Paul says about knowing Christ goes right against the grain of what we'd expect somebody like him to say. So let's see the situation in Philippians chapter 3. Can you look at it in verse 2?

Look out, look out, look out. Look out for these rival teachers. So rival teachers have come to Philippi, and they're causing trouble. They are saying very quickly in a nutshell, it was necessary for the new Christians to become like Jews.

If they were really going to be saved. That meant, as well as believing in Jesus the Messiah, that is fine, you have to be circumcised just like Jewish men. You wouldn't allow bacon sandwiches, you kept the kosher laws.

They were saying that Jewish culture was important for everybody to adopt, if they were going to be the Lord's people. And you would think that the Apostle Paul, who was a good Jewish boy, would agree with them.

But Paul doesn't say anything of the sort. What puts people, what puts you in the right with God, is actually having pride in Jesus, not Jewishness.

[2 : 33] And putting faith in Him. That is the only important thing, that's what the Apostle Paul is saying. When people don't know Christ, the other things are not worth anything. So it takes circumcision, so important to the Jews.

Actually, if you really understand circumcision in the Old Testament, what really matters is that there is circumcision of the heart. That a heart is marked out as God's, a heart that is different. And that comes from knowing the Lord Jesus, from our faith in Him. And so in light of what God offers you and I in Christ, all the other things that we might think are important, simply are worthless.

So three things if we can do them this afternoon. Number one, to know the Lord Jesus is more important than background. Number two, to know Jesus is more important than behaviour. And to know Jesus, number three, is more important than life itself. So number one, to know Jesus is more important than background. And people can so easily, can't they, put their faith in their background, their privileges and their upbringing.

[3 : 46] Sometimes people put confidence in the country that they came from. Sometimes people put confidence in their education. They were educated at such and such public school.

Or they went to such and such well-known university. And so everyone should look up to them and respect them. And that attitude is still alive and well today, even if the reality is a little bit different,

isn't it?

So what do you say to somebody with an arts degree? It'll be a Big Mac and fries please, isn't it? Or something like that. We know what it's like, don't we? And for people though, who think that because of their background, we must look up to them.

There will be people, won't there, who think I'm alright because I've got a Christian upbringing. Maybe their father or their uncle was a minister. Maybe they were baptised. Maybe they went to Sunday school as a child.

But all these aspects of background, whatever privileges, whatever upbringing we have had, whatever advantages they give us in human society, they do not count with God.

[4 : 49] They do not impress God. What God thinks this lunchtime is important is your attitude to his son. Where we are with Jesus Christ.

And Paul knew that the Philippians, they had started alright. They had put their faith in the Lord Jesus. And he reminds them of this, that he is the source of joy and confidence.

The Lord Jesus Christ. Not their human achievements. Not their qualifications and not their practices. Look at verse 7, let me read it to you again. Finally my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me. And it's safe for you. Look out for the dogs. Look out for the evil doers. Look out for those who mutilate the flesh.

For we are the real circumcision. Who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus. And put no confidence in the flesh.

[5 : 45] Though I myself have got reasons for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I've got more. I was circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel.

I was of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews. As to the law of Pharisee. As to zeal, a persecutor of the church. As to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted this loss for the sake of Christ.

Paul himself, couldn't he? He had plenty of things in his background that he could be proud of. He was circumcised on the eighth day, according to the law. That was the earliest circumcision could take place.

From his beginning of his life, the apostle Paul had been marked out as a Jew. One of the people of God. All the important rituals had been done for him. He was of the people of Israel.

Paul was a native born member of the chosen people of God. He was of the tribe of Benjamin. Benjamin was the only one of the twelve sons of Jacob born in the promised land. It was the tribe of the first king.

[6 : 48] It was one of the two tribes that had remained faithful. He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews. There were Jews in Paul's day that were not Hebrew in culture. They were Hellenists or Grecian Jews.

We read about them. Mentioned in the book of Acts. But even though Paul had come from Tarsus in Asia. Asia Maya, Paul's culture was Orthodox. He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews.

So in Wales, if you're real Welsh, both your parents are Welsh. But even that doesn't make you real Welsh. You have to speak Welsh. And so somebody said to me on Sunday, they met my friend who lives in East London.

And he said, do you know any other Welsh people? He said, I know Levy. And my friend had said, well, Levy's not really Welsh. Because my dad is not Welsh. But Paul was a Hebrew of the Hebrews.

Nobody could say that to him. And they were great advantages. Paul had a perfect Jewish background. And these missionaries were trying to get non-Jews.

[7 : 49] These teachers were trying to get non-Jews to accept aspects of Judaism. But what does Paul say about these things? Do you see it? He says, verse 7, Whatever gain I had, I counted it as loss for the sake of Christ.

That is the first point. Knowing Christ is more important than our background. And some of you here today, you might be rejoicing in your good upbringing.

Your qualifications. Your job. Your level of cultural smugness. Others may be proud of the church fags that they were.

Whether they are Presbyterians or Anglicans or Baptists or Pentecostals. Or you are the child of a famous preacher. But they are not things to take pride in. In God's scale of values, they are not

what is important.

That is like getting excited about the person who sat on the tube before you. Some famous person sat on your seat on the tube that you are going to go all on. It is ridiculous.

[8 : 55] It is Christ that matters. Not what has happened to us. If Christ is more important than background, Then we see 2nd in verses 8 and 9, Christ is more important than behaviour. And so the troublesome teachers were saying to the Philippians, They had to keep the Jewish law.

They were saying that the Philippians would not be accepted by God Unless they did the things that the law required. There are some on there. There are some parents. There are some meddling parents Who are not happy until their children are married.

And they are not happy then until their children have children. And on and on and on. And they are not happy until their children have children who go to university. And their children have children who have jobs.

And it goes on and on and on. And they add more and more requirements Over what is acceptable. But God is not like that. God this Lent's family is not adding up our merits.

To decide whether he will be favourable to us or not. God's favour, God's kindness, God's greatest best on something else. So back in verse 5, Paul said that formerly he was in regard to the law.

[10 : 05] A Hebrew of Hebrews. A Pharisee as to zeal. Pharisees were the most devout to keeping the law weren't they? They spelt out the law so that everyone would know exactly what they were to do.

So they worked out that God's law contains 613 commands. It had 248 positives. It had 365 negatives. And they thought, trying to be helpful, what are the permutations that God's law can be kept to the Esteros.

And Paul has been such a good Jew, as perceived he persecuted the church. So the Apostle Paul, before he became a Christian, his overwhelming passion that he had, he had this hatred for what he saw as heresy.

He thought these people are going against God and his passion for God's truth meant that he tried to stamp out God's enemies. And Paul says, doesn't he, as for legalistic righteousness, as to righteousness, verse 6, under the law, blameless.

I was blameless, faultless. Nobody could have raised a finger to Paul and say, listen Paul, there are aspects of God's law that you're not keeping. By Jewish standards, Paul was first right.

[11 : 25] He was fully entitled to confidence in his position and in his attainments. But what does Paul say? But in verse 7, whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for Christ.

Paul is like a businessman, isn't he? He gets to the end of the year and he's written off certain assets. Or like a car that has been in an accident and is written off.

There is no value remaining in that behaviour. And that is very, very hard, isn't it, for you and I to do, to write off our behaviour. We do not like writing off the good things we have done.

And many people, if they were asked, why should they be let in the heaven, if there is one, they would say, well I've not done anybody any harm. I've not done anybody any harm.

They would say, I've always tried to do my best. And we might imagine Paul saying at the pearly gates, God, I thank you for your law, which I've always loved and always kept insofar as I was able to.

[12 : 33] But what does he say, verse 8? Indeed, I count everything as loss, because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I count them as rubbish, in order 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 from God that depends on faith. In comparison with the Lord Jesus the apostle says, whatever good things I've done, in Paul's eyes it added up to nothing more than, well can you see it?

Verse 8, rubbish. That's what it was. That's what it was. What God had given him in knowing Christ was far more important than what Paul had done.

And the lesson that Paul has learned in Philippians chapter 3 is a lesson that we have to learn again and again and again in our Christian lives. Somehow we feel, don't we, that God just must be somehow impressed by my behaviour.

[13 : 51] He must be impressed with our good behaviour. But just as Paul's attitude is not what we would expect, God's way is not what we would expect. Surely what we achieve is the greatest importance to God.

No, for in God's way, human achievement is not the way of salvation. Being a good sort of person can even lead you into a real false sense of security.

We might think we can have confidence before God because of the fact that we are rarely bad tempered. We are kind people, we are wise, we are liked in the office, we are actually quite humble. We might have confidence before God because we give regularly. And we give generously. Or because we pray and we read the Bible. And we may think because of such things that makes God pleased with us.

And Paul is saying that our righteousness is not an important one. It is the righteousness which is through faith in Christ Jesus that is important.

[14 : 55] And this righteousness comes as a gift from God. And it is secured by Christ's death. This righteousness is received by faith.

Let me give you a silly and adequate illustration. It is a six year old boy and his sister. The boy is taking a biscuit. He goes upstairs and the biscuit is stale.

So he puts it down the toilet. And when it stays there floating, his father comes in from work. He discovers the floating biscuit in the toilet. And he said, who did this?

Both the children, both the son and the daughter deny it. The son says, perhaps it came through the pipes from the neighbours house. The father says, we do not have lying in this house.

You both go to your room until one of you owns up. The boy says to his sister, one of us is going to own up. Why don't you give it a go? The sister goes to her dad and she is punished. The boy is free because the sister is punished.

[15 : 54] That is a terrible illustration. Because when Jesus died, he took the punishment for us. But Jesus did not take the punishment gullibly or by mistake.

Jesus meant to die so that you and I could be forgiven. And to accept Jesus' righteousness is to let him do what he wants to do.

We can't deserve this. We can't earn it. And faith is the way that we receive the gift. Faith in Jesus means in this life, accepting that he has done it.

It has been called a great exchange, isn't it? He is the just who dies for the unjust to bring us to God.

Jesus Christ takes our sin and gives us his righteousness. And Paul wanted to remind the Philippians there is something more important than our background.

[16 : 58] There is something even more important than our behaviour. God looks at those who are in him as if Christ's behaviour was ours. And when we know Christ, for Paul this experience of Christ thirdly is more important than life itself.

More important than life itself, verse 10 and 11. Death is still a taboo, isn't it? It is the ultimate statistic. One out of one people die.

But we can get barriers wrong. So for centuries the Cape at the bottom of Africa was considered impassable.

Ships couldn't get round it. Storms raged around there. And they were always wrecked. It was called the Cape of Storms. But eventually there was a man called Vasco Tagama.

He found a way through the Cape and he got round to the Indies beyond. And he renamed it the Cape of Good Hope. That was a barrier that loomed large.

[18 : 02] But it eventually turned out not to be a barrier at all. And the Apostle Paul has met the risen Christ. Who has risen from the dead. And Paul knew that death is not the end.

But a beginning. For Paul, life and death took on a new meaning because of the Lord Jesus. So look at verse 10. That I may know him.

And the power of his resurrection. And may share his sufferings. Being like him in his death. That by any means possible I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

To know the Lord Jesus Christ is to see life and death in a different perspective. Think of that great power of God. That raised Christ three days after he died.

Scientifically it cannot be contemplated. Yet it happened. And there are many people who seem to be alive today who in God's eyes are dead. That may be you.

[19 : 02] You are the living dead. You have not been raised from the dead by Christ. And Christ gives power over death. Those who are spiritually dead can be brought spiritually to life.

And what a privilege it is to be involved in this power. I think Paul is talking about his own physical resurrection isn't he? That is what he longs for.

That if in following Christ physical sufferings or death come about. That doesn't ultimately matter. Because there is resurrection from the dead.

And Paul wants to receive what God has for him. Even if it is a death like the Lord Jesus. He is not afraid of joining with Christ in suffering. Because he knows even though he cannot explain it. That resurrection is in store.

To know Christ is to let life and death take on a new meaning. But what we think of today as life itself will turn out to be much overrated.

[20 : 08] But just as surely as however much we value our relationship with Christ. We will find one day that we underrated him. We have not treated other things as rubbish in comparison to him.

And we are much the poorer because of that. And so this great passage challenges the Philippians. To watch out. And not put their confidence in their background.

And not put their confidence in their behaviour. And then there is this final awkward challenge. To put our faith in Christ.

Above our comfort. And above well everything. Above absolutely everything. Let's pray. Let's pray.