

KEEPING YOUR JOY - The Heartfelt Theology of an Isolated Prisoner - Part 14
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COUNTING EVERYTHING LOSS FOR KNOWING CHRIST - THE PROCESS OF FINDING LIFE'S DEEPEST JOY (Part 2)

Philippians 3:1-11 - “Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. [2] Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. [3] 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— [4] though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: [5] circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; [6] as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness, under the law blameless. [7] But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. [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 count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ [9] 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— [10] that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, [11] that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”

Last Sunday we started out on our study of the process of finding life's deepest joy and how that process was rooted in counting everything loss for the sake of knowing Christ. I said there were three roots to this joy-quest in this text.

Last Sunday we considered the first - **If you want to find deepest joy in knowing *Christ* you must set yourself to be *against* what is contrary to him.** The key revelation of that counter-cultural truth we studied was **Romans 12:9-10 - “Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. [10] Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.”**

Today we'll consider two more ideas.

2) **RELIGIOUS DEVOTION AND MORAL PERFORMANCE, IF IT FAILS TO EXALT THE GREATNESS OF CHRIST, IS A HINDRANCE RATHER THAN A HELP IN KNOWING GOD**

This theme takes the majority of Paul's emphasis in our text:

Philippians 3:2-9 - "Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. [3] 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— [4] though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: [5] circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; [6] as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness, under the law blameless. [7] But whatever gain I had, *I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.* [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 *count them as rubbish*, in order that I may gain Christ [9] 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...."

This sets Paul's words in the first verse in their proper context. The term "***dogs***" isn't ***name*** calling. These Jewish legalists knew dogs were emblematic of what God had set off as ***unclean***. Paul isn't belittling their equality as ***persons***. He's bluntly pointing out their rejection of the law of God. That's ***why*** this became such a generic, all-inclusive descriptive term for the Gentiles.

But that's not the stunning point of this text. What would be shocking to all Paul's readers is Paul isn't describing **Gentiles** in this text. He's talking about **Jews**. Paul flips the tables. What is **truly** unclean, says Paul, is any devotion at all that supplants or supplements the work of Christ. To insist on any religious law - even Old Covenant law - in an attempt to supplement the work of Christ is as filthy in God's eyes as any Gentile sin.

Paul then becomes autobiographical in his own religious pedigree. Outshining them all in his personal devotion (4-6), he then makes what is his key point in **verse 7** - "**But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.**"

This is the crucial verse. We must let it say **all** the words **mean** to say or we will miss Paul's point. Paul's point is **not** that he has become **indifferent** to his former religious devotion - like he can now **take** it or **leave** it. No. That's not even close to Paul's meaning. He means what he used to count as a **plus** - a **help** - an **aid** - in his pursuit of God, he has now come to see as a **minus** - a **hindrance** - not a **gain** at all, but a "**loss**"(7).

Most people don't recognize it, but what Paul is describing for us in this story of his life is the process of his own **repentance**. We think of repenting of the **bad** things we have done. And we do it, in common church understanding, at the **beginning** of our Christian life. But Paul isn't talking about the **bad** things he did. He's talking about what his life used to be at its very **best**. He's talking about the way he spent his time and his very best moral and intellectual efforts in the construction of his life.

This process was what he had to repent of. Repentance means becoming **divinely indifferent** to what used to enamor. It means turning from what was once considered **best** in life - not what was **worst**. Repentance means turning a cold

shoulder to what were formerly objects of **devotion**. Very precisely, it means we **replace** what was more precious and wonderful to us than anything else in life with **Christ**.

Karl Barth says it brilliantly in his little commentary on Philippians - ***“The repentance Paul describes here is nothing less than seeing the heights upon which I used to stand as now being abysmal; the assurance in which I used to live as lostness; the light I used to have as darkness....the plus itself changes into a minus.”***

Then Paul gets to the heart of the matter in **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 count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ....”***

Now we’re coming to the heart of Paul’s surprising quest for the flavor of joy. This change of his life’s orientation - this ***counting everything once important and precious as “loss”*** - this ***wasn’t*** a one time emotional catharsis - or a one time adjustment.

This was Paul’s ***settled state of affairs*** - ***“Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord....”*** (8).

There is something so profound in that sentence. I pray you see it today. You only know the **worth** of something - of **anything** - when you **compare it with something else**. If you cling to **everything equally** you don’t know the superior worth of **anything particularly**.

Paul didn’t just know Christ was wonderful and good and gracious and loving and

mighty. He knew in his own experience the **worth** of Christ precisely because he had found Christ **surpassed** everything else he previously considered great and wonderful in his life.

Notice carefully that this is the very word Paul uses in connection with his discovery of the worth of Christ - ***“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 count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ”***(8).

Notice those two **mental process words** - ***“in order....”*** Those are **timing words**. They express a **sequence**. Paul means to emphasize the ***“...counting everything as loss,”*** and the ***“suffering the loss of all things....”*** comes first **in the order** of Paul ***“knowing Christ,”*** and ***“gaining Christ”***(8). Forgive me, but this is a neglected emphasis. This is a very different process than the commonly held notion of simply ***“accepting Christ.”***

Might we be missing something here? This is surprising truth number two. Real faith isn't just **affection** toward Christ - not even **great** affection. Real faith - the kind that produces great excitement and joy - always **barters** for Christ. Christ never requires mere **acceptance**. One must always **trade** for Christ. Saving faith is constantly ***trading away what seems precious in favor of the surpassing greatness of Christ.*** The greatest threat to robust Christian joy is **not** having too little, but embracing too much.

On to surprising insight number three in the quest for joy:

- 3) **OUR LIVES ARE DEEPENED IN RICHNESS AS WE EMBRACE THE JOY OF SUFFERING FOR THE CAUSE OF CHRIST**

Philippians 3:10-11 - “....that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, [11] that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”

If you watch religious television on Sunday afternoon you will probably get the impression that the power of Christ’s resurrection is power to **overcome** suffering, opposition, and strife. That’s why it’s so interesting that Paul specifically states the **purpose** of the power of Christ’s resurrection, as it’s experienced in our lives, is to **lead us into** suffering for Christ. The **first** thing Paul mentions after the power of Christ’s resurrection is **suffering** in Christ’s name - “**that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death....**”(10).

The **meaning** of this suffering for Christ is best made clear in **Philippians 1:27-30** - “**Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, [28] and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. [29] For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, [30] engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.”**

This is what the power of Christ’s resurrection is **for**. It is given to create a clear “**sign**” of how precious Jesus Christ really is. How will the world **know** there is “**surpassing**” worth (3:8) in following Christ? Of course, they can hear my **words** about how wonderful Jesus is. I suppose they could come into one of our worship services and see me with my eyes closed and my hands raised - sort of “**lost in**

wonder, love and praise,” as the hymn says. But that would only prove that I **love** Jesus. It wouldn’t prove I love Him **more than anything else**.

So how would they see I love Jesus **more** than I love anything else? How will they see that, to me, Christ has **“surpassing”** worth over all else - even the things I hold quite dear and precious (**3:8**)? There’s only one way that can happen. They will watch what I am joyfully willing to **lose** for Christ. They will watch to see what happens when following the call of Christ means losing a dear friendship, or a good job, or a chunk of material wealth, or a promotion. They will watch to see if I bend under the pressure of my peers - **will Daniel bow to the idol when everyone else does on cue?** They will take note of how I **spend precious time** - when I only have so many hours to get so many things done, yet Christ calls me to give much of that precious, limited time to worship and service.

“Those are very hard choices to make, Pastor Don. I don’t think I have that kind of inward strength. It’s just not in me.”

You’re right. In fact, it’s not in **any** of us. That’s where the power of Christ’s resurrection kicks in. That’s why the Holy Spirit is given. That’s why Paul says sharing in Christ’s suffering is the **highest evidence** of both the **worth** and the **power** of Christ in our hearts.

Now the link with Paul’s theme of **abounding, resilient, joy** becomes clear. Suffering for the cause of Christ brings joy because it brings **fruit** for Christ’s kingdom. Our lives start to eternally **mean** something. We cease being merely **consumers** and start becoming **agents of the life and grace of Jesus**. What we do finally **matters eternally**. Our lives become spring loaded with eternal impact.

But what of those difficult words in **verses 10 and 11 - especially verse 11?**

“...that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, [11] that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”

Does Paul mean he has questions about whether the resurrection is certain or not? Does he mean he has doubts about it all? No, that's not it. What he means is he strives - and wants to **keep** striving - to make sure he lives his present life constantly willing to demonstrate the surpassing greatness of Christ. He doesn't take this for granted. It's not easy to do. So he **labors** constantly in that direction.

Perhaps he says it all most clearly in **Romans 8:16-17** - **“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, [17] and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.”**

Understandably, we usually only quote **verse 16** as a stand alone thought. But it doesn't stand alone. It's unbreakably linked to **verse 17**. Our lives participate in Christ's power and resurrection, not lightly or automatically. We demonstrate we are **“heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ”** only in our joyful willingness to suffer the loss of all things to radiate the surpassing beauty and greatness of knowing Jesus Christ. God help us all to fulfill this high and holy calling. And God deepen our joy as we do.