

The Exchanged Life: Philippians 3:1-16

Introduction:

One of the eternal realities that has guided me is the verse in Philippians 1:21 where Paul says, “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” In other words, there has to be something of such great value to compel a person to give up what they most dearly love. And for the Christian, that thing is the privilege of knowing Christ. In Philippians 3, Paul says that knowing Christ is of surpassing worth.

. That sounds like a good deal...and it is. It’s worth every sacrifice...but it will be costly...in fact, according to Jesus, it will cost you everything. So we must be willing to give up other forms of gain in order to gain Christ; and I would call this, the exchanged life. That’s where Paul is going this morning – so let’s pray, and jump right in. **Pray.**

Point #1: We are called to rejoice in our resting position in Christ – Philippians 3:1

Look with me at **Philippians 3:1. “Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.”**

The first thing to notice here, is that this is not a request. It’s a command to rejoice exceedingly in the Lord. And though this is a command, this can be misleading. It can cause us to assume that we are to conjure up joy in and of ourselves. I don’t know if you’ve ever approached joy this way, or ever had someone tell you to “just be joyful?” If you have, you probably know, as well as I do, the difficulty in just being glad. It’s nearly impossible.

Just this week Angela and I were working on 17 hours of pre-training before we go to training next week...and just being glad wasn’t getting the job done. Earlier in the week, we got a letter saying one of our kids’ passport photos was too bright, and they couldn’t process his application until we sent in a new photo...this came after 7 weeks of waiting for the passport to arrive. In the moment, of my own resources, I wasn’t rejoicing. And the reason is because I cannot manufacture this kind of joy that Paul is commanding in this verse. And I would submit to you, that I don’t think that is what Paul is going after – I think he is going after a much deeper truth about our joy in Christ.

Paul uses the phrase “in the Lord.” That word “in” I-N, is the Greek word “en” E-N. And this word has two meanings that I see Paul applying in this passage that give us cause to rejoice:

1. The first is truth of our position in Christ

When we are born in this world, we are born into Adam. Meaning that we are born spiritually dead, and utterly sinful. We are under the curse of the law – and we are all lawbreakers; And the punishment for our sin is death. And this is our natural state. But when we come to faith in Christ, we are transferred from Adam, into Jesus. And we see this truth fleshed out in the epistles.

Galatians 2:20 teaches us that we have been crucified with Christ. Colossians 2 teaches us that we have been filled in Christ --- that we've been buried with him, and we've been raised with him to new life. And if we look at Ephesians 2, we find that we've been seated in the heavenly places IN Christ. And this means that we are standing in his finished work of redemption through the cross and the resurrection of Jesus. As it says in Phil 3:9, we don't have "a righteousness [of our own] that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ..."

And the second meaning that Paul is going after denotes how we function in that position in Christ – it signifies a place of rest...or to say it another way, to rest in your position in Christ. And in this sense, you no longer are striving to please God – striving to do for God, but you are resting in his life, in his accomplishments, in his fulfillment of the law, in his gospel. **2 Peter 1:3-5 says that, "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence."**

So, in a very real way, we come to understand that all the resources we need to rejoice in the Lord have been granted to us through our resting position in Christ – because he has given us all we need for life and godliness. We already have it...we cannot manufacture it, but we rest in Him who gives us all the cause we need to rejoice.

But then Paul says, **"to write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you."** What does he mean by this? Did you know that Paul talks about joy and rejoicing 14 times in this letter? And what is so significant about this, is that Paul is writing these commands from a dingy Roman prison – a place that most of us wouldn't be rejoicing. So, what makes Paul so different from us? It's because he has found something, or someone, of such great value, that it makes his present circumstances a cause to rejoice. And that cause, is his joy in Christ.

A point of application here: What is your basis for joy in this life? Is it your resting position in Christ? Is it your circumstances? Paul's cause to rejoice wasn't his surroundings and present reality – but it was something of greater substance – it was Jesus. If you know your

position in Christ, rejoice in Him. And as Paul says in **Philippians 4:1**, “**stand firm thus in the Lord.**”

Point #2: Beware of where you place your confidence: Philippians 3:2-3

In light of the realities of who Jesus is, and our position in Him, Paul now sends out a warning. He brings to our attention the competing truth claim for how one is made right before God. These competing truth claims are dangerous, and act like a parasite to the faith of a believer. And the competing truth claim is that salvation before God can be achieved through performing good works and obedience to God’s law.

Paul says in verses 2-3, “**2 Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—**”

The Greek word for “look out” means to “beware” or to “take note of.” And this is a warning to beware of people who place their confidence in their own flesh. So, who are the “dogs,” “the evildoers,” and “those who mutilate the flesh?” They people in the church who are presenting an alternate truth claim that salvation can be achieved in other things apart from Christ...very likely they are a Jewish influence that is still clinging to the law. And if that is so, then these are odd words to use for this Jewish influence, because typically, these are descriptors not of Jews, but of Gentiles. And the fact that Paul is saying these things to a Gentile audience is instructive of how the gospel of Jesus is sufficient to save not only Jews, but also Gentiles.

A good example of this is found in Matthew 15 when Jesus interacts with the Syrophoenician woman. Here we find Jesus walking through a Gentile region of Tyre and Sidon, and this woman approaches Jesus asking him to heal her demon possessed daughter. And Jesus’ response to her is, “**...it is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.**” This sounds like a crude response on the outside, but we need to understand this situation more deeply. The children that Jesus is referring to are the children of Israel, and the dogs are the outsiders, the Gentiles. And what Jesus is saying is that he has a mission to bring the gospel to the Jews first in order to fulfill the promise given to Abraham centuries before. And as promised, that covenant will spread to all nations and peoples; or in other words, the Gentiles. The woman understood her position, and so she says, “**Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.**”

Though this woman is an outsider, she is looking to the only source that can save her and her daughter. And as the text says, she had great faith in Jesus. And when Jesus hears her response he heals her daughter. And here is where we see how the gospel flips the old order on its head; because here we see a Gentile “dog” who is given the rights of the children of Israel. And what is the condition for her inclusion? It’s not obedience to the law, and it’s not being born into a Jewish family; it’s faith in Jesus.

And this is what Paul is aiming at here. You see, in the old-world, the Jews thought they were saved by their birthright and their observance to the law; and they failed to understand that the true children of God are those who believe in Him by faith as Abraham did. And now, in the new covenant, the Gentiles, who used to be outside the promises of God, who were called dogs, are now the insiders by faith in Jesus.

And when we take this idea and place it back in the context of Philippians 3, we see that there was a group in the church that were attempting to persuade these believers that salvation could come from obedience to the law. And Paul says to this church, ‘beware of those people who attempt to find their boast, their salvation, in anything other than the Lord.

And then verse 3 he explains what true worshipers are. Like the Syrophoenician woman, the true people of God are those who worship by the Spirit of God, not through law keeping – they are those who glory in their resting position in Christ Jesus, and not through works of the flesh. Why does Paul make this distinction? Because...

Point #3: The flesh has no power to save you: Philippians 3:4-6

“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.”

Paul has just finished saying that the true people of God don’t put confidence in the flesh, and now he is challenging all of us to consider his attempts at attaining salvation in the flesh. So, what was Paul’s boast in life? He was circumcised on the 8th day according to Jewish law. He was born into the people of Israel. Specifically, he is of the tribe of Benjamin - likely he is named after Saul the first King of Israel. And when he evaluates his own ranking in society, he

says that he was a Hebrew among Hebrews. What is Paul describing here? He's describing his heritage and identity. And this identity was a major source of confidence for him, because in it, he saw that he was among the elect of God for salvation.

And then he goes on to speak about his performance in that identity. He says that as to the law, he was a Pharisee. Who are they? They are the religious elite. The teachers, the examples for modeling true Judaism and observance to the law. How zealous was Paul? So much so that he fiercely opposed the church and persecuted them. How self-righteous was Paul in his own eyes? Blameless. So, what is he describing here? His performance, which in his eyes, was perfect.

And yet, in verse 3, Paul says that true worshippers don't place confidence in the flesh, but worship by the Spirit of God, and glory in Christ Jesus. So, we are left to ask, if Paul couldn't attain salvation through his own performance and spiritual heritage, of what value is self-righteousness and works before God? It's nothing – it has no value at all. But later in this chapter, in verse 8, Paul will tell us that knowing Christ is of surpassing worth.

So, a point of application: What is your boast? Paul is calling us to consider what we are placing our confidence in – what we find meaning, and value, and identity in? Is it Jesus, or is it something else? Whatever it is, Paul's exhortation at this point is to "beware" and "take note of it." Do battle with it, so that we are not deceived into thinking that we can boast about anything other than who Jesus is, and what he has done for us.

Point #4: Living the Exchanged Life: Philippians 3:7-11

Paul says in verse 7, **"⁷But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ."** Notice the language Paul uses, he says that he "counted" all his gain as loss for the sake of Christ. Does that language sound familiar? If you look back to Phil 2:5-8, it should remind you of what Jesus did for us. **"⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, ^[c] being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."**

Paul is merely emulating what Christ has done for him. Jesus counted his majesty, his rights, as God, as if it was nothing. He humbled himself and became a lowly man. He obeyed

God perfectly in all his commands for us, in our place, and then he humbled himself to the lowliest, humiliating, and torturous death, in our place, on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins against God. And in order to accomplish our salvation, Jesus had to give up his rights, and exchange them for a lowly position as a man. And like Christ, Paul is ready to make a similar exchange. He is ready to give up his boast, his hopes for attaining salvation in his identity and performance, all for the sake of Jesus. This is called “the exchanged life.”

Do you know what Paul is doing here? He’s actively bringing his life into agreement with the gospel by exchanging his boast, his self-righteousness for Jesus’s righteousness. This is something that all of us must do. Matt Chandler remarks on this exchange when he says: “Fearless faith comes from holding on to Christ as our treasure. Gospel courage comes from gospel preciousness. If we truly believed that our reward in heaven (which is Christ) far surpasses all the comfort and convenience and collections of this world, we, too, would be willing to consider them as loss.”

But it is important to note the difference between be willing to do something and actually do it. By that I mean that, it is much easier to “count something as loss” in thinking, but it is much more difficult to do so in action. George McDonald says, “To hold to a doctrine or an opinion with the intellect alone is not to believe it. A man’s real belief is that which he lives by.”

Paul is not only willing to “count” things as loss – he’s ready to act on it. In verses 8 and 9 he details this when he says, **“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—”**

Here he is saying that he finally recognizes the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus. He sees the glory of the knowledge of the gospel fulfilled in Jesus Christ. And as a result, he’s willing to forsake all things so that he can gain Jesus!

Many people may be willing to suffer the loss of things, but few actually suffer them as loss. You might be wondering, why am I preaching this sermon? Why this topic? It’s because we are going through this process right now. As we prepare to move overseas, we’ve been confronted with these truths, and feel a desire to bring our lives into agreement with the gospel.

And we desire, not only for ourselves, but for you to have a predecided ‘yes’ to Jesus when he calls you to do something hard no matter the cost!

This is what the exchanged life is all about...This is true repentance in action. It’s the deliberate turning from the pursuit of self-righteousness and going after the righteousness that is found in Christ. I think that sometimes we can look at a passage like this and think, “Wow! Paul is extreme! But he’s a missionary – and missionaries are held to a different standard.” But the truth of what Paul is describing is that the exchanged life is where Christians are born.

Turn with me to **Luke 14:25-27, 33** and let’s listen to Jesus on the cost of gaining Christ. **“Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them,²⁶ “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple...³³ So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.”** This is the cost of being found in Christ. Paul isn’t being radical in these verses...he’s being Christian.. This sounds like a lot to lose in order to gain Christ; it seems that way because we live in a temporal world, and struggle with living in our sinful flesh. But the eternal reality here, is that when we make this exchange, when we truly live it – we attain true gain, the salvation of our souls.

And it’s this exchange life that we live that leads to a close identification with Jesus. Paul says in verses 10-11, **“that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”**

This type of relationship with Jesus is the outcome of living the exchanged life in Christ. And Paul desires to know Jesus so intimately, that he wants to be wholly set apart to Christ in his life. Notice the language he uses, he says he desires “to know,” “to suffer with,” and “to become” like Christ. This is a type of identification with Jesus that might make some of us uncomfortable; something we might actively avoid – but to Paul – this isn’t extreme...it’s just being Christian. That is why Paul can say in Phil 1:21, “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” He knows that all of this suffering and hardship is leading to something. It’s leading to a resurrected body, in the age to come, where Paul gets to be with Jesus. So, whether he’s alive here, or alive there, his goal to get Jesus.

Are you willing to identify with Jesus in this way? When others look at your life, would they see this? Those are hard questions, but I also think that they are questions that call all us of as believers into deeper intimacy with Jesus and help us to grow up into full spiritual maturity. To truly live as living sacrifices before the Lord.

Point #5: The exchanged life is a continuous pursuit of the prize: Philippians 3:12-16

Now the encouraging thing is that, though Paul is speaking very convicting words, he is also helping us understand that he hasn't yet attained perfection. Paul is humble enough to acknowledge that he has more work to do in growing in his knowledge of Christ – and so do we. However, in these verses, he helps us understand what the pursuit of “knowing, “suffering with,” and “becoming like” Christ should look like. He says in verses 12-16, “¹² **Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.** ¹³ **Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,** ¹⁴ **I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.** ¹⁵ **Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.** ¹⁶ **Only let us hold true to what we have attained.”**

In these verses, we should ask, what is Paul after? He doesn't want to get complacent in his walk with Christ and pitch his tent where he is. He wants the prize!

So, he presses on to know Christ more intimately, so that he can attain “the prize for the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” And what is that prize? I think it's two things:

1. It's so that he can gain, be found in, and know Jesus (vss. 8-10)
2. It's resurrection from the dead – or in other words so he can be with Jesus in the age to come (vss. 11, 20-21).

This is his prize! And in order to attain that prize, Paul must continue his pursuit of Jesus. He can't give up! And it is this pursuit to know Christ that Paul, in verse 15 calls Christian maturity.

Conclusion:

Do you desire to be a mature Christian? Then make Jesus your ultimate pursuit! Through your position in Christ, rejoice in Christ, and make knowing him your ultimate aim. The Bible says in **John 3:16**, “**For God so love the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.**” You see, it was love that led Jesus to count his rights as nothing; it was love that compelled him to become a man; it was love that led him to a life of true obedience in the flesh; and it was love that led him to die on the cross for our sins and rise from the dead. And brothers and sisters, it is love that compels the Christian to give up all his gain for the sake of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord. That’s why this matters, because a life sold out for Jesus is a life that loves and rejoices in Jesus.

One of my favorite songs these days is “Give me Jesus.” It’s a simple song, but it’s a song with great meaning. In summary the lyrics say, “In the morning when I rise, when I am alone, and when I come to die...give me Jesus. You can have all this world, just give me Jesus.”

My prayer for all of us is that we would continue to grow up into maturity in Christ where we can truly live those words...because Jesus is not only worthy of such a life, but he’s worth the sacrifice! **Let’s pray!**