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[0 : 00] I almost feel I don't have to preach after that song.

It's fantastic lyrics, really highlighting our great need of Christ and to be found in him and have him rescue us and not to have to do anything ourselves but just to cast ourselves on his mercy and on his grace.

I'm going to just pray very briefly before we begin. Let's pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

In Christ's name. Amen. So let me begin with a question. What do you live for? What really matters to you?

What's at the centre of your existence? Are these questions too much before your second coffee? Is it too much for this time in the morning to consider a question like this?

[1 : 08] I didn't grow up in a Christian family. My parents are not Christians, even to this day. There's nobody else in my family who is a Christian at all. Just myself and my wife.

And when I was 15, something happened in my life that made me become a very different person altogether from who I was and made me the beginning of the person that stands before you today. Before then, I was involved in crime of a low-level kind, just petty theft and minor drug use.

And I was generally just a mess. I was not a nice person to know. I'm not a fantastic person to know now. But I was certainly much worse to know back then.

And coming to know Christ entirely changed who I was, what mattered to me, and quite frankly saved me from a very horrible future.

[2 : 10] And now my experience of becoming a Christian was very light to dark. It was very quick. It was quite sudden. But it has lasted. And God has made himself known to me more and more as I've gone on with him.

But not everybody has an experience like that, of course. Some people come to know Christ in a very slow way. Perhaps over a period of many years. They might grow up in a Christian home and be entirely unsure as to whether they're a Christian for a long time, when in fact they are one. Perhaps they might become a Christian at some point in their lives and for a long time just be unsure as to whether they've really come to know God, just because it wasn't as dramatic a change as they've heard in other people's lives.

I had a friend who had initially a very dramatic change in his life and really came to know Christ in a meaningful way, but completely lost that sense of surety and joy that he had having become a Christian.

And for a period of around 12 months lived a very sad existence as he was unable to really say that he definitely knew Christ for himself. There's all sorts of different ways to begin a relationship with Jesus.

[3 : 21] Now the passage of scripture that we're going to consider this morning in Philippians chapter 3, we're going to look at the first 11 verses together this morning, and we're going to look at verses 12 to 16 this evening.

These verses tell us something of the life of a man called Paul. Paul is the man who wrote this letter, and he was a Jew, a very, very religious Jew, a man of great importance in his day.

He was trained by a scholar known as Gamaliel, and he was a very influential character in his society and was known amongst his people, and he was very, very religious, very dedicated.

And the level of his dedication was such that he was even involved in the persecution of Christians. It wasn't just that he was kind of, you know, not concerned for what these Christians think, it wasn't just that he was uninterested, he actively persecuted the church, as he tells us in this passage.

And we're going to move in sort of very broad brushstrokes through this passage together this morning and consider what was it that really changed for Paul, what made a difference in his life, and what would that mean for each of us here today.

[4 : 35] So that's what we're going to consider together. Let me give you a little bit of a context about what he's writing first, okay. So he begins by saying this, Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. It's no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.

And he says, watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. This is the context and the time in which Paul is writing. There's a bit of a controversy going on in the early Christian church, right?

There's a discussion about, do Christians need to get circumcised and obey the law of Moses in order to be really spiritual Christians, to truly be a Christian?

Do they need to do that? And Paul is writing to this particular church in the midst of this controversy that's still ongoing, and his conclusion is most strongly and definitely, no, Christians don't need to do that in order to come and be saved, in order to know God.

And what he wants to say, and what he'll highlight in this passage, is that the thing that changed him was not all the good things he had done. It was not the good person that he had become.

[5 : 41] It was not his religious devotion. It was not his obedience to the law of Moses, because as he says in the passage, according to righteousness under the law, he would have been blameless, he says. That's the description he would have had of himself as a religious Jew, or completely blameless under the law.

Personally, I think that was probably impossible. I don't think he really was blameless under the law. 613-odd commandments to keep. Must have broken some of them at some point.

Fairly sure that would have happened. But nevertheless, he's saying, if you're talking about being a Jew, and doing really Jewish things, and keeping the law, I was the top dog.

I was the guy who, I did all the stuff, and like, I was the Jew of Jews. He says, I was a Hebrew of Hebrews. And yet, something changed in Paul's life that meant, actually, none of that really mattered to me in the end, when I came to know Christ, and discovered that getting right with God, beginning a relationship with God, being acceptable to God, was absolutely nothing to do with all the Jewish works that I could possibly have completed, with all the good things that I could possibly have done.

And that's the basis of Paul's argument that he expands in other letters, not specifically much detail here, but he's warning them about these people, and one of the things that he's giving them as an example as to why they shouldn't follow those dogs, and they shouldn't go with those people who mutilate the flesh, and tell Christians they've got to do this and that.

[7 : 11] One of those reasons is that actually coming to know Christ is very different to them. You come to know Christ a different way. And it's that section that we're going to look at this morning. So Paul is writing this section with an agenda.

His agenda is to highlight to these Christians that he's trying to encourage that it's all about Jesus. Okay? Maybe you're here this morning and you're not a Christian. And you're wondering, what is it that they just bang on about Jesus for?

These Christians just go on and on and on about Jesus. What's so special about Jesus? I'm hoping to highlight a few things this morning.

Now, as I've already highlighted, Paul didn't always feel this way. Let's look at these passages together. It's we who are the circumcision, he says, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh, though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

If anyone thinks he has reasons 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, a Pharisee.

[8 : 20] As for zeal, persecuting the church. As for legalistic righteousness, faultless. Paul is saying here that true Christians are not those who keep all those commandments, but in fact, he grew up keeping all of those things.

He grew up as a very religious Jew. Let's look at these different things that he puts towards himself together. He's saying, if these people think that the flesh, doing good things, can make them right with God, I would have way more confidence than they could possibly have to be right with God.

Because look at all these things about me, he says. Circumcised on the eighth day. So he has the covenant sign, the people of Israel, he's a bona fide, 100% Jew.

Of the people of Israel, a descendant of Jacob, of those to whom the promises were made, a descendant of Abraham, to whom the land was promised, a real, actual Jew, the really, you know, he's the pure Jew.

He's not a Samaritan, he's not a Gentile. In terms of people who would think that they could inherit the promises that had been made, that they could really get to know God, that they could have his acceptance, Paul was one of the guys who would have thought he was first in line.

[9 : 31] He looked really holy. He's going round and he's doing everything that it looks like God was requiring him to do. And these people who are going round, he's saying, in comparison to who I was, they're not as obedient as I used to be.

If anyone thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more, he says. And then he specifies a few things about the kind of Jew that he was.

He says, in regard to the law, a Pharisee, one of the strictest sects of the Jewish movement of the day. These were the kind of the holiness movement people of the day.

They were back to basics Jews. They were, let's get back to the law. Let's do exactly what God requires. And sometimes they would even build up extra commandments around the commandments of the Old Testament to try and make sure that they couldn't break those.

So that if they broke their own silly little commandments, they still wouldn't break the main commandments. That's what they were trying to do. They were thinking that if they just added on all these requirements and if they just tried to keep all these different laws, that that would make them pure and acceptable to God.

[10 : 40] And he's saying, that's the kind of Jew that I was. I was a strict religious Jew. As for zeal, he says, lest you think it was just an outward show, as for zeal, he says, I persecuted the church.

I went against the church of Christ. I was willing to actually hurt other people in my pursuit of becoming what I thought was a perfect person. I was willing to give my approval to the death of a Christian.

I was willing to travel miles to pick them up and put them in jail. That's the level of commitment that he had to what he was doing.

He sounds far more committed than some of us are to anything. He was really serious about trying to get right with God by being good enough.

And he says, as for legalistic righteousness or as for righteousness under the law, faultless. He was doing it all. He was ticking all the boxes and it mattered to him.

[11 : 48] And then he says this, 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. Something happened in this man's life, something dramatic to make him talk about his former way of life as if it were rubbish. If he's given so much of his time and energy and effort to becoming this perfect Jew, this perfectly obedient religious person, full of zeal and dedication to his religious cause, if he's given his whole life to becoming that way and suddenly he's turning around and he's saying it was all rubbish, it was nothing, it was nonsense, it was loss, I just, I wish I hadn't done it.

Something really dramatic must have taken place in his life, I'm sure you'd agree. And he says, I consider it a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

Christ walked into Paul's life quite literally, introduced himself and told Paul that he was going to be his from then on.

[13 : 34] And I believe that in the time that Paul spent away from the church, I believe he received more revelation from Christ of one kind or another. Paul came to understand what Christians call the gospel, the message about Jesus.

Paul came to understand that all the good things he thought he had done, firstly, could never possibly have been good enough for God. God. Because even the best things that we do are still tainted with our impure motives or our inability to follow through on words that we say or promises that we make.

And even if we could be the best that we could be in our present condition, the sin that dirties every part of us means that we could never be in ourselves acceptable to God.

And so Paul discovered that actually there was a way to be right with God, a way to be accepted by God, a way to know God that didn't depend upon the good things you could do under the law. What is it he says? To be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ. So let's define a few of those terms to give us some clarity.

[15:01] Not having a righteousness of my own, a goodness, not having a perfection or a completeness, a goodness before God of my own.

So his acceptance with God depends upon not how good he is, but on a righteousness that comes from somewhere else. A righteousness not of his own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ.

So that's how Paul was made right with God. That's the way in which he was changed. He put his faith in Jesus Christ and became this different person.

Something radically changed in his life. Suddenly he was completely free from his need and desire to fulfil lots and lots of different commandments. Christians. Christ became everything to Paul.

So much so that he says he was willing to suffer the loss of all things. Think about what it would have cost a person like Paul to become a Christian. He would probably have been ostracised from different members of his family.

[16:12] He would have been rejected by his community, persecuted by former friends. Not only that, but the kind of life that Christ was calling him to was a life of sacrifice and service.

He was going to take the gospel everywhere. He was going to take this message about Jesus all over the Mediterranean. And when you read some of the lists of the sufferings that this guy went through, it's an awful knot to go through.

Fighting wild beasts near Ephesus, he says. So this guy goes from a comfortable, religious, Jewish life where he has some sense of personal importance to having to fend for his life and against beasts to be considered the scum of the earth, he says.

So what was it that made it worth it? Why would he go from this position of great comfort, of ease, of acceptance, of importance to becoming the scum of the earth?

And it was that he came to know Christ and Christ was worth it. he gained Christ.

[17:25] In verse 8 it says, I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ. He had a choice and the choice was between his own righteousness and Christ.

That was it. Couldn't have both. both. He couldn't both do all the good things he wanted to do and get to heaven under his own steam and come to know Christ.

And he had seen that as he came to know Christ and he had experienced that in knowing Christ there was a kind of joy, there was a kind of gain, there was a kind of happiness that far exceeded everything else he'd ever had.

You see, Christ was not a means to an end for Paul. It wasn't that he wanted to go to heaven to get some heavenly stuff and Jesus was just the train that took him there.

He wanted to gain Christ. It was about knowing Christ, that's what he wanted. He wanted Jesus. He says in verse 10, I want to know Christ.

[18:35] And the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings becoming like him in his death. What about for you?

Is Christ just a means to an end in your life, my Christian friends? Is Christ just what you kind of use to get to where you want to be? Is Christ even just a way that you gain social acceptance? with Christians? Or is it that Christ is the most important thing, the most important person in your life? Because that's where he belongs to be.

At the very heart of our existence. This is why Christians bang on about Jesus. Because actually, coming to know Christ is the singular most incredible experience in the entire universe.

Not to overstate it. Knowing Christ, it is the fulfillment of the heart's deepest longings.

[19:47] It is acceptance with the one who made you. It is a kind of satisfaction that transcends circumstances. And it's not just about getting the satisfaction.

God doesn't ask us to sacrifice joy to please him. In fact, the way that God most glorifies himself in our existence is to fulfill us, for us to show that he is infinitely more valuable and precious than anything else that there could possibly be.

So the call to each of you this morning, whether you're a Christian or not, is give it all up. That seems to be the application of this passage. Give it all up. Whatever else you're trusting in,

whatever else is at the heart of your life, whatever else has become most important to you, give it all up.

Throw it all away. Because it's all rubbish, all of it, even the good things. And there are plenty of things in your life that should matter to you.

Your family, your friends, the church, working hard at your job, paying your bills. There's all kinds of things that are important and right and good. But if they become the most important thing, something horrible has happened.

[21 : 06] Because Christ ought to be on the throne of our hearts, at the centre of our being. Now we know that we stumble and fall and fail in many ways and our hearts are fickle.

But the call this morning is clear. Christ is offering a kind of joy that you can't lose. Even if you don't feel the fullness of it now, the seed of it can never leave you, even in sadness and sorrow.

And Christ is calling you to give everything else up and come to him. And the reward, of course, is a future with Christ.

This world is not all there is. Paul says, I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

There's a day coming and all people who have ever lived, will be raised to life, and will be judged according to what they've done. And, of course, if left to their own devices, if each of us were simply judged according to what we've done, the answer would be guilty, and there would be eternal punishment for each of us.

[22 : 36] But, you see, if we have this righteousness that Paul found in Christ, comes through faith, we can be sure of acceptance with God. We can be certain of a life ahead of us filled with peace and blessing and an end to suffering of all kinds.

There is a world of infinite joy centred on Jesus, offered as a future to all who believe. It's part and parcel of coming to know him.

Knowing Christ means an automatic qualification for this world to come. So the final question I would ask to all of you here this morning is the question I began with.

What's at the centre of your life? What matters to you most? If it isn't Christ, I'm not sure the scripture would say you're truly alive at all, but it would instead say that you might be dead in your transgressions and in your sins.

The good news is that anybody of any kind or age, of any stature or importance, can come to Christ freely today and receive forgiveness of sins, receive hope of a life everlasting, if you will turn away from your love of sinning and trust in him.

[24 : 15] I'd like to close with just a few words from that song that we sang earlier because I think they kind of highlight the conclusions that we've drawn. Why not get it up in front of you, 539 in the hymn book, just glance over it, or just read a few of the verses from the middle.

Let not conscience make you linger, nor of fitness fondly dream. All the fitness he requires is to feel your need of him, and this he gives you, tis the spirit's rising beam.

Come ye weary, heavy laden, bruised and broken by the fall, if you tarry till you're better, you will never come at all, not the righteous, sinners, Jesus came to call.

That's the good news, that Jesus has come for sinners like me, for hopeless people like me, and is willing to rescue any who come in faith, and to give you everlasting happiness.

Well, let's stand and sing then to the praise of God, number 637, and meditate on some of these things. We're going to look at the rest of that section that was read to us this evening, 12 to 16, and what it means then to become a mature Christian, having become one and hoped in Christ.

[25 : 52] Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present to you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy, to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power, and authority through Jesus Christ, our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore.

Amen.