

The Value of Knowing Jesus Christ

Our Scripture reading comes from Philippians 3:1-16

Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. ² Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. ³ 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— ⁴ though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else thinks they have reasons to put 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; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

⁷ But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ 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, 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 is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

¹⁵ All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. ¹⁶ Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

Thanks for the opportunity to bring God's word to you this morning. I have titled today's sermon **The Value of Knowing Jesus Christ**. Paul is writing from prison to the church in Philippi to encourage them and challenge to mature in Christ.

Now speaking of values. Value has to do with something that is important to you. Something that carries a lot of worth and weight. Values shape our lives, and they help us to focus on our goals, therefore keeping us from any distraction that would take us away from our preferred direction. Values also determine our priorities. Values are ways we evaluate whether our lives are turning around the way we want it to. So, values are very important in our lives.

In our text today, Paul will tell us what he valued and why. Also, this is a very interesting chapter in the book because Paul tells us his testimony. He gives us an insight into his personal life. We get to see the things he valued that used to shape his life prior to Jesus. And we get to see why left those set of values to pursue another value that shaped his life in a different way. It is Paul's way of helping us see what it means to mature in Christ in a practical way. What Paul will say here is so fundamental and essential to our maturity in Christ. And it is something we should take seriously.

Let me tell you a quick story that made me think of this topic in a deeper and reflective way.

A few years ago, I attended a monthly zoom meeting with pastors from various churches in Waterloo region. They had a speaker, Shaila Visser, she is the National Director of Alpha Canada. Alpha, is that tool developed by Nicky Gumbel to help people explore the Christian faith. Shaila, talked about the current spiritual and digital landscape on our country and the leadership it takes to navigate it.

I was interested in that topic because I've been thinking about it myself so I was looking forward to it and wondering what she would say about it. The thing that caught my attention more than anything she said was what she said at the beginning. She just talked to us on personal level, not as a leader. She talked about our personal relationship with Jesus. And how we need to pay attention to it. And grow in Christ because **we lead out of who we are**. I appreciated her pastoral posture and how she prayed based on that posture for us at the end.

And that is the posture from which I want to speak to us this morning. I want to invite us to really think about our personal relationship with Jesus. Do we value it? Do we prioritize it? Do we really know Jesus? Is he really the love of our lives? Or are we just engaging in religious activity. Friends, knowing Jesus, valuing him above all else is at the heart of what Paul wants to say to us. And he will show us what that looks like from his own personal example. So let's dive into it.

Philippians 3:1-4. ***Whatever happens, my dear brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. I never get tired of telling you these things, and I do it to safeguard your faith.*** (Again, this is Paul doing what he loves to do. He is grounding us in the truth of Christ. That is where true joy comes from. It doesn't come from the highs or lows of life)² ***Watch out for those dogs, those people who do evil, those mutilators who say you must be circumcised to be saved.*** (He is referring to some teachers who were bent on the law and traditions of the Pharisees. They were teaching these non-Jewish believers in Jesus that any person who wants to be a follower of Jesus must be circumcised according to the Jewish traditions. And Paul is firmly saying that is wrong. He called them dogs, a term of contempt to show his strong disapproval of them. Because they were advocating a wrong set of values for the believers to focus on. Those values would take them away from Jesus if they followed them. It would rob them of joy)³ ***For we who worship by the Spirit of God are the ones who are truly circumcised. We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort, 4 though I could have***

confidence in my own effort if anyone could. Indeed, if others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more!

What Paul just said here in verse 3 is at the heart of what it means to be in a growing relationship with Jesus. That is: to rely on what Jesus has done and not what we can do.

Friends, it is so easy to fall into this mentality that we must do something to gain the approval of God. Most of our problem in relating with Jesus or God comes down to this: **Do we trust in what Jesus has done for us, do we trust that he is enough OR do we think there is more for us to do to gain his approval.** And that tension is further compounded because our identity is tied up with what we do. **Give example**

But when it comes to our relationship with Jesus, we must value what he has done for us above what we do. It is an issue of trusting him versus earning our way to him through our efforts. It doesn't mean we fold our arms and do nothing. It means we get to do many things because he is already pleased with us.

Friends, you are not defined by what people say or think about you. You are defined by what Jesus has already done for you. You are loved, you are accepted in the beloved. You are spoken for. You are chosen.

In the next few verses Paul tells us he used to get it wrong too. He used to live based on the wrong set of values that these false teachers were promoting. Let's read from verse 5, ***5 I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. 6 I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault.***

Now, do you hear what Paul is saying? There is nothing wrong with all these achievements in of themselves. But what was wrong was that Paul valued them so much that he was driven by them. His

identity was wrapped up in them. And he thought he was fine and doing good by all standards. **Except that when he met Jesus, he discovered that what he had was nothing compared to what Jesus had to offer.**

Now before we move on. Let me say this: The sad reality for many of us is that we are caught in the same reality Paul found himself here. We place so much confidence in our human effort and achievements.

Let me ask us a sobering question. *Who are you if you do not have the current status, you have now as a father, mother, parent, worker, entrepreneur etc.* If everything you have and have achieved is taken away from you, who will you be? Will you be able to survive? Will you have an identity crisis? Will you be able to say, “*Jesus because I have you, I have everything I need, and you will sustain me because I rely on you.*” That is a sobering thought. **Example about my identity crisis and Father’s love.**

But again, what you have is what you have, and you will hold onto it if you do not know that there is something else that is more valuable than all you have now that you are clinging so hard to.

Paul discovered something more valuable than all his accolades and achievements, and he was willingly let them go. Let’s read on from verse 7. ***7 I once thought these things were valuable,*** (And they were truly valuable. And he was fine with them. His life was good until he discovered something even better.) ***but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. 8 Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage,*** (wait a minute Paul, are you crazy? what do you mean all your achievements are garbage, there are a lot of people who would do anything to have what you had. But Paul, if you are this crazy, then there must be something about this Jesus that is worth more than all you have that you now call garbage. And Paul says, Yes, there is.) ***so that I could gain Christ 9 and become one with him.*** (Let me say this: most times when we think of our

relationship with Jesus, we think of it in terms of loss. The fun we won't have anymore, the friends we won't have anymore. The reputation we won't have anymore. But Paul is thinking in terms of gain. He is gaining something that is even more valuable than he thought and that is why he can call the other things he used to value and live for as garbage. How will your relationship with Jesus change if you think of it in terms of what you gain? Reflect on that.) *I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith. 10 I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, 11 so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!*

Now the first part of what Paul said right here looks good to me. He says he wants to experience the mighty power of Jesus.

Who doesn't like power? I do, I bet you do too. I have a list of things I can do with that power. You do too. But suffering and sharing in his death? That's not exciting. That is depressing. But Paul is saying something profound here. The way to real life, resurrection power, and a thriving and growing relationship with God that transcends all of life's aches and challenges is through death. Death to this world. Death to you trying to save yourself. Death to all the idols we cling to from whom we get our false identity. Death to our reputation. Death, death, death. So that we can be resurrected unto life, life, life.

Common friends, we understand this. A seed goes into the ground and dies but it comes back to life to produce a tree with fruits. You go through difficult time in life, a loss. But you come out the other side better than you were before. A company or business goes bankrupt. There is a loss, but they re-evaluate. They make some changes and after some years they are thriving again.

In all the examples I just gave, there is a deeper knowledge. There is a deeper experience. And you value it so much. Yes, things were bad but the knowledge you have now, you do not want to trade it for

anything. There is a fuller understanding and deep insight that is gained. **And what is gained now, makes what was valued before look like garbage.**

Friends, this is what Paul is describing to us in his own experience of counting what he had as worthless for the sake of knowing Christ. You enter into this ever loving; everlasting, ever fresh, ever joyful, ever productive life despite the sorrows, heartaches, hurts of life. **And that is valuable above all else.** Such a life is available for us in Christ and that is why Paul is challenging us to keep maturing in Christ.

Now, lest you think Paul is perfect and he has perfected the art of knowing Jesus. To that he says no. But he tells us how he keeps this value of knowing Jesus fresh in his life. Let's read verse 12.

12 I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. (I am glad Paul said this. It is an answer to a question we have. Do I have to be perfect in knowing Christ? Cos I am more conscious about my imperfections. And I do not always value Jesus above all else. Paul is saying to us. It's not about perfection. It is about pressing on. Don't let your imperfections distract you.) ***But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me.*** (Oh this is so good. He is saying: Jesus already lives in you, he has chosen you. Just keep following his prompts in your life. Keep following him as best as you can. He is working in your life already) ***13 No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead,*** (Stop living in the past. Stop dwelling on your mistakes, stop letting the past dictate how you live now, instead look forward. Yes, you feel like you had three steps forward and you went back two steps. But you gained one. That is progress. Celebrate it.) ***14 I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. 15 Let all who are spiritually mature agree on these things. If you disagree on some point, I believe God will make it plain to you. 16 But we must hold on to the***

progress we have already made. In other words, do not let what you don't understand about God or Jesus hold you back. Go with the truth you know already about Jesus that is transforming you.

Friends, your relationship with Jesus is so valuable. Do not take it for granted. Keep growing in your knowledge of him. There is so much to discover in him and it's worth leaving other things to pursue him.

As I close, here are some questions I want us to ponder on with regards to how much we value our relationship with Jesus as Paul encourages us to.

--Do you have a relationship with Jesus?

--Do you really want to know him or you're okay with your life as it is?

--What stirs your affections for Jesus? It varies for everyone. Embrace them

--What takes away my attention from Jesus?. It varies for everyone. Avoid them.

However you answer these questions, here is the posture of Jesus towards you. He had divine privileges, but he set them aside. He humbled himself to become like us. He was obedient to the Father even willing to die for us. Friends, he values you and me that much. He knows you, he wants you to know him. The invitation is always wide open.

Let's pray.