

## House Church Message Notes May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020 – In Lockdown (8 Weeks in Philippians)

### Week 6: Perseverance in Lockdown (Philippians 3:1-21)

- **Introduction**

- *But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 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. (Philippians 3:7-8).*
  - *Really? Everything a loss compared with the worth of Christ? Here is another one of those shocking statements of faith that we're getting used to hearing from Paul in this letter, showing us again how knowing Jesus can turn a life upside-down.*
  - This week we're looking at all of chapter 3 of Philippians. There's a lot to cover, so we're just going to break it down into four chunks and look at some highlights in each section. A lot of content is packed in to these 21 verses; Paul issues a warning where we're going to need some historical context to understand, and he overlaps multiple metaphors including finances and athletics to drive home his point. Let's dive in, open your Bible to Philippians 3:1-6.

- **Philippians 3:1-6**

- *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. Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. 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—though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else thinks they have 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; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.*
  - There's a lot going on here. It starts out simple enough: rejoice in the Lord! We've heard that before. Notice how he says that rejoicing in the Lord is actually a *safeguard* for your faith—that's interesting. And practical. It reminds us that joy in the Lord is not just a passive feeling that we wait for, but a conscious decision we can make any time—because, regardless of your feelings or circumstances, *He never stops being the Lord*. So, go ahead and rejoice in the Lord!
  - But then Paul starts rambling about dogs and evildoers, mutilators of the flesh, and circumcision. This is one of those passages where it really helps to know the context in order to understand the message. He's referencing here one of the biggest challenges of the young church: the division between Jews and Gentiles. The Jews—the Israelites, the children of Abraham, God's special, chosen people. Then there's the Gentiles—everybody else, non-Jews, pagans, the unclean, idolaters—the Roman world and all the other empires who had oppressed Jews. It was common for Jews to refer to the Gentile world as *dogs*. The division was engrained into the consciousness of the Israelites for their 2000-year history up to the time of Christ.
  - It's easy to forget this today, but the first Christians were *Jews*. The 12 Apostles and Paul were Jewish. Jesus was *Jewish*. But if you read the Old Testament story closely, you see that from the beginning, these people were set apart *from* the world, but *for the sake of the world*. The ultimate plan was always for the whole world, to open the blessing to *all nations*, all peoples, regardless of culture—and this plan was fulfilled in Christ then carried out by his followers.
  - Even though Paul was a *Jew* among Jews (to the point that he persecuted the church), he was chosen to carry this Gospel across the barrier of the Gentile world. And he did it very effectively, planting churches across the Roman Empire. He came to see this as the special mission Christ had called him to. But there were other Christians in this time who were staunchly committed to their Jewish identity and made it *their mission* to insist that Gentiles who came to Christ do so through the Law of Moses.
  - These kinds of Christians would have come to the Gentile church of Philippi and viewed them as only *half-Christian* until they implemented the full extent of the Old Testament law—including the law that all males, even adult males, be circumcised immediately.

- Imagine that—imagine how the history of Christianity would be different if one of the core practices for becoming a follower of Christ was for adult males to be circumcised (not just infants as with the Jewish people). *Ladies, you think you have trouble getting your husband to come to church today?*
- Paul is adamant that this is not the way of Christ and this “enslavement” to the Law is not what Christ died to purchase for us. He was not anti-Jewish in any way—and to be a biblical Christian is not about being anti-Jewish, quite the opposite actually. But Paul and the Apostles came to see that Christ’s life, death, and resurrection *changed the game* and graciously opened up a whole new way of what it meant to be one of God’s covenant people. The real circumcision, the real marker of identity, is now through *faith* in Christ. That’s why we call it the *New Covenant*.
- Paul is making the point here that when Jewish-Christians insisted that non-Jewish believers take on all the outward, cultural markings of Israelite law in order to be different from the world around them, they’re actually being like every other culture—placing their confidence “in the flesh,” in their own sense of heritage rather than the Spirit and Truth of the Gospel.
- We might think we’re past this kind of thing, but how often in our culture do you see people using their sense of pride in their national identity, or their political affiliation, to look down on those who are different? Tribalism continues. The Gospel continues to be the great equalizer.
- **Philippians 3:7-11**
  - *But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 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 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. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.*
  - All of that talk about cultural identity really set the stage for the main thing here: Paul keeps bringing it back to Christ. And this is an amazing statement of faith that makes sense of the radical ways Paul, and other followers of Christ, have lived.
  - What’s happening in this passage is actually a metaphor from business and finances. The basic practice of business and personal finance is figuring out profit and loss, or income and expenses. Have you ever worked with a financial planner? The first thing they’ll probably have you do is fill out a spreadsheet that accounts for all of your income, your expenses, your assets, and your debts.
    - During our first few years of marriage, Emily and I were “DINKS”—Dual Income No Kids! We did ok, but as two kids fresh out of college it took us a little while to really figure out what was happening with the bank account. It wasn’t until Julia, our first child, was on the way that I sat down with a financial planner to talk about things like life insurance, savings, investments, retirement, all that stuff. Clinton sent me a spreadsheet from his company and I entered in our monthly income, our fixed and variable expenses, our debts from school loans and cars and credit cards, and our assets (which at the time, as you can imagine, was pretty much nothing—an encouraging experience!). Then, we set some goals and figured out what to do with the leftovers.
    - With all that stuff in mind, look at this Scripture: Paul is taking the spreadsheet of his life—anything he would consider to be an asset, the cultural pride of his pre-Christian life that was so powerful in defining his identity, *everything* that he once thought made his life matter, anything of value—he takes all of the profits on that spreadsheet and switches them over to the loss column, and in place of all those values he simply puts Jesus. Just Jesus.
    - *The surpassing worth of knowing Christ becomes THE WORTH of His life.* It sounds radical, even obsessive. And it is *the* effect of knowing Jesus on a person’s life. It is the power of the Gospel that turns the world upside down, one life at a time. It’s what Jesus meant when he said that to really find our lives, we have to lose them for His sake (Matt. 10:39).

- It's the point of his parable of the treasure hidden in a field, where a man sold everything he had to purchase that plot of land in order to gain the treasure.
- Think about it: if you were to suddenly inherit a massive palace full of gold, it probably wouldn't take long for your current assets to start to look like...wasted space! And this is what it's like to have Christ, to be found in Christ.
- *"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 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... I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead."*
  - John Eldredge said, "To have Jesus, really have him, is to have the greatest treasure in all worlds. And to love Jesus—that is to settle the first question of human existence. Of your existence. Everything else flows from there..." and "loving Jesus will not be a problem when you know him as he truly is."
  - That's the point of Philippians, the point of the whole New Testament! When you see Jesus for who he is, when you encounter Jesus as he truly, you will suddenly—or at least eventually—come to see that the *surpassing worth of knowing Christ is such that everything else in life seems like a loss instead of an asset*. We're talking about the King of kings here! The bestower of the free gift of eternal redemption! Your greatest asset and the aim of your life is now *Christ*.
- **Philippians 3:12-14**
  - *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. 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, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*
    - In view of the surpassing worth of Christ, we must press on. We must persevere like a distance runner headed for the finish line. If you lose sight of Jesus, you'll lose sight of the race. But if you remember who Jesus is and what he has done for you (go back to Phil. 2:6-11), your heart will *run to him*. Strain towards that heavenward prize with everything you've got.
- **Philippians 3:15-21**
  - *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. Only let us live up to what we have already attained. Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*
    - Christian maturity isn't feeling that you've arrived and can sit still. It's realizing that you're never done growing until the Day you meet Jesus. It's also not trying to *escape* the world—Christianity is not about escapism, it's about transformation. Our citizenship is in heaven although we live in the world: like a small, shining colony of heaven, our mission is to bring the culture of heaven and to extend the reign of heaven in a foreign land. And here we wait for the Savior to return and make all things new, including our frail bodies which will one day *be like his*.
  - Is there anything more precious than that? More worthy than Him? Of course not. And though our hearts may wander and our legs may grow weary, he continues to knock on the door so we can let him in again and again to be lavished by his love, his hope, his goodness. So, turn to him again today and let him define your worth, your purpose, and your identity according to his truth. He is so generous and so ready to do that for you, just let him in. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, let him in.