

Paul's Letter to the Philippians

Session Nine May 20, 2020

Philippians 3:7-11

Paul picks up his discussion about his past life as a Jewish Pharisee and lawyer, counting it all as a “loss” compared to having a relationship with Jesus Christ, which is the greatest gain.

Paul continues to describe for the Philippian church what it means to be “found in Christ”, outlining his belief of righteousness and justification of faith in Jesus Christ through his resurrection.

Opening Question...

(1) Describe something in your life that is valuable to you. Why is it so valuable?

Last week, Paul warned the Philippian church about the possibility of Judaizing Christians arriving and spreading their beliefs that the church members must follow Jewish law practices as a means of becoming “true Christians”. Paul also shared that these traveling missionaries might challenge his authority, specifically his “Jewish heritage and credentials”, as a way of undermining his teaching. Paul shared his “Jewish resume” as a way of sharing where he came from and why he holds so strongly to his beliefs in a covenantal relationship with God and a devoted relationship with Jesus Christ.

This week in Philippians 3:7-11, Paul picks up on this discussion by talking about how these past accomplishments, while at the time seemed important, now mean nothing compared to his relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul goes on to describe for the Philippians church the importance of being found “in Christ”, referencing the Christ-centric poem in Chapter 2. Paul outlines for the Philippians the status or covenant that each Christian has access to that is defined, not by the law (which was being emphasized by the Judaizing Christians), but by righteousness or faithfulness through the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

3:7 – Once were gain, now are a LOSS!

For all our mathematics and bookkeepers out there, Paul is using some “ledger” talk as he begins our section tonight. Picking up on our

discussion from last week, he had just finished listing the seven items that made him a “Super Jew”. All the things that he had mentioned that he had previously counted as a “gain”, now he says, move them to the loss column. They mean nothing! To the Judaizing Christians, they may mean something. However, to Paul, they do not count as anything. Why? For the sake of Christ! For knowing Christ, they mean nothing. Anything we place ahead of our relationship with Jesus Christ means nothing.

3:8 – Paul’s Path, Our Path, the Church’s Path...

Paul goes on to say that the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus is beyond words. There is nothing that we can possibly gain that can stack up to that relationship. Paul is echoing the poem from Chapter 2 that we discussed just a few weeks ago. To truly understand the value of who Jesus Christ is as the Messiah, we should be willing to suffer the loss of all things, just as Paul did. That is Paul’s story. That should be our story. If we think about it, that is every Christian’s story. We have to be willing to give it all up for him. To go a step further, this story becomes the church’s story – ecclesiology. Christology becomes ecclesiology. Knowing Jesus Christ was central to Paul. We see it here in verse eight. We see it again in verse ten. It is sprinkled throughout the Philippians letter. To him, everything else is rubbish.

3:9 – “My aim is to be found in Him” – Center of the Passage

Paul’s life goal (and it should be every Christian’s life goal as well) is to be found “in Him” (in Christ). What does Paul mean by this? For the Judaizing Christians, this would mean to live by the law, follow the Torah, and to live in a right covenantal relationship with God defined by the rules and restrictions of the Torah. For Paul, however, Jesus Christ transformed what “covenant” meant when he came and died on the cross and through his resurrection. We talked about this last week when he expanded the chosen people to include Gentiles as well. For Paul, to be “in Christ” was to have covenantal status defined by faith in Jesus. The ability to have this relationship was a gift from God because of Jesus’ obedience to death on the cross and his resurrection. All Christians are called to wear that badge of faithfulness as a sign of our allegiance to Him. When Christians believe, that is the “sign” (faith) that they are “in him” – “in the Messiah”.

God's ultimate desire and design is to restore the world to the right again. To begin this process, He puts people in the right first to be a part of putting the world in the right again. In Jesus Christ, He restored humanity through forgiveness of sins. Through Christ's resurrection, new creation emerges and a new chosen people – Jews and Gentiles included – are restored. Humanity has the choice to accept Jesus Christ and this badge of faithfulness. Any other "badge" leads to division and fracture.

3:10-11 – Power of His Resurrection

Paul emphasized to the Philippians that the great hope for the restoration of Israel was through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through his resurrection, his people have been remade and renewed. The hope of people of Israel was that the new nation would be reestablished and that they would be able to help run the nation. This was the hope of any Jewish follower. Paul was stating that the only way for this to happen was to know Jesus Christ and the power of his resurrection. If you want to be a part of the New Israel, the new hope, you must know the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Moreover, just as Christ did, just as Paul is experiencing, you too might experience suffering and even death. Paul was reminding the Philippians that the Christian way was often swimming upstream, but that is okay. It was well worth it in the end!

Paul reminded the Philippians that Christ and nothing else define your value!

Paul went on to explain to the Philippian church that the way to be "in Christ" is through a faith relationship with the Messiah, not following written Laws.

Follow Up Questions...

What do you need to “count as loss” in order to grow in your friendship with Jesus?

How does Paul’s idea of sharing in Christ’s sufferings challenge you?