

A STUDY ON PHILIPPIANS

Week 3

Philippians 3:1-4:1

Joy in Knowing Christ

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Philippians 3:1-3, Joy and Worship Deeply Planted in our Souls!

Paul doesn't mind *repeating* himself, as he knows that it *strengthens people's faith* (v. 1). He encourages the Philippian believers to not let anything stop their joy as it is attached to the Lord Whom they confess. At the same time he is *warning* them that they should be very careful of people who *act as if they are working for the Lord, yet are doing the exact opposite* (v. 2a).

Their evil actions will help the believers to see what they actually stand for. They are simply trying to get people to fall back into all kinds of Jewish customs, like circumcision (vv. 2b-3a). It is not worth following all these things as *what truly matters* is not what some human did to your body, but *what God Himself is doing to you* (v. 3b)! Remember, His Spirit is able to reach even into your body, to your heart and soul. *Through God's Spirit* we can now *speak to God, serve, honor and worship Him* with all our heart (v. 3).

Why would we therefore rely on things of the flesh?

- ❖ *The world and people of the world will always try to trick* us to think attachments to the world and things done to our bodies are greater than what God can give us. For Paul it was people trying to get the people stuck again in Jewish customs and laws. What are some of the things that people might try in our culture that we need to be aware of?
- ❖ What does it mean to you that *God reached into the depths of your soul* and that you can *talk with Him, serve and worship Him* from such a place?

Philippians 3:4-8a, The Things of the Flesh Pale in Comparison to Christ

Paul now goes on to list a *lot of things of the flesh that he once had a lot of confidence in*, even more than some of the people now trying to wrongly promote these same things (v. 4).

However, after meeting the Risen Lord he now knows that none of this whole list of stuff really matters or has any value at all anymore (vv. 5-8a):

- He is an Israelite, through and through!
- He was circumcised on the eighth day as he was supposed to as a faithful Jew.
- He is part of the cream of the crop so to speak—he is from the tribe of Benjamin!
- He is fluent in Hebrew, the language of the Jewish gatherings.
- He is a member of one of the most important parties, a Pharisee, the group who aims to be perfect in following the Jewish law.
- He was one of the most zealous Jews, both following his own laws without fault, but also to the point of persecuting the Christian church.

Paul now realizes that *none of it has value* as it simply *distorts your attention* from what is really important and that is to know *Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior* (vv. 7-8a)!

Nothing compares with this!

- ❖ Do you have a *list of things you have or are putting your trust in* that you now realize might not have the value that you once attached to it?
- ❖ It seems the list of where to put our trust is very short, yet indescribably powerful: JESUS CHRIST. Why don't you take a moment in prayer to *pause, confess and proclaim your trust again in Christ, Your Lord?*

Philippians 3:8b- 11, Christ...CHRIST...Christ!

Since his encounter with the Risen Lord Paul's entire outlook on everything changed forever. Once you know what you have in Christ, all these things that were once so important to you simply don't matter anymore. In fact it all becomes totally worthless...rubbish (v. 8b)!

Christ becomes ALL.

Christ is now more important than everyone and everything else you might think of combined!

Therefore we should *leave all that this world can offer behind for Christ* (v. 9a). When God looks at us He should see us in a close, intimate relationship with our Lord *alone*, the One Who corrected our standing with God forever (v. 9c). *No law, custom or anything else did this or can ever do this* (v. 9b). Peace and an *eternal solid relationship with God can only come from faith in Jesus Christ* as Lord and Savior (v. 9d). God made certain of this (v. 9d).

Only one thing now remains worth chasing after: *To know Christ* (v. 10a). *To live out of the same Power that raised Christ from the dead* so that we do not run away from suffering—even suffering leading to death as with Jesus (vv. 10b-11)!

Is it not true that if it is all about CHRIST and all we have is Christ then we already have victory over death? *With Christ we will be resurrected*—so with Christ we can live *fearlessly and fiercely*, right to the *very last breath* we take on this earth (v. 10). And then...with the *very first breath* we take in the presence of God—the first of our forever breaths (v. 11)!

- ❖ Read through this passage in the Bible, and this teaching on the passage again. *What did the Spirit stir in your heart?* Write it down, and pray over it with care. I believe this passage can change the course of our lives...forever.

Philippians 3:12-14, Jesus Got Me! Now, Let the Race Begin!

Paul shatters a common misperception that some believers often have:

When I received Jesus as Lord and Savior I've arrived and the race is over (vv. 12-14).

This is obviously not true.

The truth is:

Once Jesus got a hold of you, you are now set for the most meaningful, fruitful and successful Race of your life, a Race that will even jump the hurdle of death and continue into eternity (v. 12)!

For this reason Paul begins this passage by *emphasizing* that he is *not* claiming that he has *obtained all things spiritual yet*, or has arrived at the ultimate spiritual goal yet (vv. 12-13a). However, *Jesus did get a hold of him*, very firmly so as He does with all of us, His children (v. 12). A truth that can allow Paul/us now to reach out with all our might to *grasp the spiritual goal of eternity in heaven with our Father as we are now running this Race on the right track, with the help of our Lord* (vv. 12-14).

Paul is therefore not claiming that he is perfect, but that he is giving it his all to constantly run in that direction (vv. 12-13a). And as expected from a great athlete he *doesn't look back* to his past and all that went wrong (v. 13b). He has his *eyes simply fixed on the finish line*, pouring every ounce of his strength into obtaining the *prize at the end of the Race* (v. 14a). A prize that God Himself will deliver, welcoming him Home because Christ Jesus got a hold of him (v. 14b).

Children of God, we got the best start possible—now, let us run the Race well!

❖ How are you doing with the Race you are running? Let's break it down:

- Reflect on how you value the *day Jesus got a hold of you* and *your Race started*.
- Are you looking ahead as you run, or are there some things in your past causing you to look back? If so, why don't you take a moment to *let your Coach help you so you can run this Race again only focusing on what is ahead*—the Finish Line and your Father waiting for you!
- *Imagine* the moment you will step onto the podium and God Himself hands you your Prize, followed by an invitation to walk with your Lord into your new Home. How is that encouraging you to run this Race better than ever before? *What would "better" mean for you?*

Paul once again *warns* through a great emotional plea about *people who really don't love Who the Lord is and what He did* (v. 18). *Believers should not lose their way and start following these people*—the track they are on is leading to a cliff with an eternal, disastrous ending. They are all only about their own interests and selfish desires, rather than serving God. They are proud about things that we should actually be terribly ashamed of. Thinking about God is far removed from their hearts, while the things of the world are what have value to them (v. 19).

As *believers* we are much different from such people. We *value things of our heavenly destination*, where our *true citizenship* is and *from where our Savior will come again* (v. 20). And when He comes He will change this weak, human body. He will make our body new as His own human body was renewed and glorified after His resurrection. His power, which exceeds all powers will do this. *What He sets out to do, He can do—no doubt* (v. 21)!

Paul longs for the Philippian believers and deeply loves them. They give him so much joy and let him feel like a king (4:1a)! All of this adds to Paul's wish that they, his dear friends, will *stay faithful* to the path that the Lord has called them to (4:1b)!

- ❖ Who would be some of the *spiritual mentors* in your life whose example you can follow? Be sure to list them by name and then say a prayer for them as they contribute to your faith journey and help you to grow in spiritual maturity.
- ❖ *Are you a spiritual mentor to someone else? Who?* Don't forget that this is not only people "out there", but could also simply include your spouse, children or grandchildren. Make a list of whom you mentor or lead by example, and then pray for their faith, and for yourself to continue to lead them well!
- ❖ *Don't lose your way—stay on track!* What did the Spirit impress on your heart today so that you can do exactly this?
