



Summer 2016 Walking Through Philippians

Sermon Transcript
August 7, 2016

Remember the Gospel
Philippians 3:1-11

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on August 7, 2016 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio copy of the sermon on CD is available by request at (860) 563-8286. An audio version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com.

Sermon Text
Philippians 3:1-11

¹ Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.

² Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. ³ For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—⁴ though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for 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; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order 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 comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Introduction

“Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.” That is how our passage this morning begins. It begins with the word *“finally,”* suggesting that Paul is approaching the conclusion of his letter to the church in Philippi. As he begins moving towards his closing thoughts, he calls on the Philippians to *“rejoice in the Lord.”* If you know anything about this short letter, you might think that this is a fitting way to close this letter. The call “to rejoice” is a common theme throughout this letter. We hear this call once again in the next chapter with one of the most familiar verses in the entire letter, *“Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say rejoice.”*

Have we not seen, as we have made our way through this letter, that Paul practices what he preaches? He is not telling them to do something he is not doing himself. He is not telling them to *“rejoice in the Lord”* while he himself is grumbling about his situation in life. Here he is, because of his faith, sitting under house arrest in Rome and chained to a Roman guard. He was two years imprisoned in Caesarea and now he has been transferred to Rome where he was confined another two years. He thinks he will eventually be released, but he is not completely sure that will be the case. He does know that there is always the possibility that this imprisonment could lead to his death. And yet, reflecting on his own suffering for the sake of the gospel, Paul writes in Philippians 2:17-18, *“Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith [in other words . . . even if this imprisonment leads to my death], I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.”*

Furthermore, not only does Paul have to contend with the trouble of being confined by house arrest, but we saw in Philippians 1 that some of his fellow workers in the gospel, brothers in Christ, possibly men he invested in and taught during his house arrest, have been hurtful in some way to him. He said that they preach Christ out of a sense of rivalry and he adds in Philippians 1:17, *“not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.”* We don’t know much of the detail behind these strained relationships, but you get the sense that they added salt to the wound of his imprisonment. And yet, Paul says of this personal hurt and hardship in Philippians 1:18, *“What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.”* In other words, as long as they are proclaiming Christ I can rejoice in spite of my own disappointments and these personality clashes, whatever they happen to be.

And so out of the example that Paul has modeled for this church in Philippi, Paul begins to move towards his concluding thoughts and he says to them, *“Finally, my brothers,*

rejoice in the Lord.” The only problem is that this is not the final “*finally*.” We pick up the word “*finally*” again in Philippians 4:8 where Paul says, “*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable . . . and so on* and then he gives his personal thanks for sending their gift to him and for their concern for him and then he extends his final greetings to them. In fact, in Philippians 4 he returns to his concluding thought, calling them to “*rejoice in the Lord.*” So in Philippians 4 we have the true “*finally*” to the letter.

So what is happening in Philippians 3 with this word “*finally*”? We need to remember that Paul is writing on a scroll. Scrolls didn’t come with delete buttons, nor can you cut and paste text on a scroll like we can on computers. Quills didn’t come with erasers. I get the sense that as Paul begins to write Philippians 3, he is moving towards his concluding thoughts. He wants them to follow his example and find their joy in the Lord and to not let their circumstances in life rob them of the joy that comes in knowing Christ. And so upon writing the words “*Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord*” he suddenly remembers something else he wants to remind them. He remembers something he wants to address before he really comes to his concluding thought. In fact, he has talked to them about this issue before, possibly even written to them about it as well. He says, “*To write the same things to you is no trouble to me.*” In other words, I know I have told you this before, but it is so important that you don’t forget this. In fact he says that if they hold on to what he is about to say it will keep them safe. He says in verse 1, “*To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and is safe for you.*”

So what is it that Paul wants to address before he gets to the “final finally?” Very simply put, Paul is going to remind them to not forget the gospel. There can be no compromise on the gospel. In fact it is holding on to the gospel that is the source for our joy, even in the midst of difficult circumstances. It is holding on to the gospel that allows me to be able to say, “*Rejoice in the Lord . . . always.*” Our joy is not contrived. It is in the Lord!

So this morning I want to spend some time reflecting on the gospel. The reason Paul says that it *is safe for you* is because in Romans 1:16 Paul tells us that the gospel is “*the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.*” So while you might think that this is Christianity 101, don’t forget that the gospel is the power of God to save. Furthermore, the gospel is not something that we just once believed at a point of conversion. The gospel is something we continue to believe, it is an ongoing and present belief and an ongoing power in our lives. This reminder by Paul is a warning to us of how easy it is to add something to the gospel. Once you add something to the gospel, it ceases to be the gospel. That was the problem Paul was warning them about and he warns us this morning as well. So we are going to look at the gospel this morning.

Eventually, I am going to ask you three questions this morning to help you evaluate where the gospel sits in your life. I will ask you to ponder these three questions.

- Where is your confidence?
- Where is your righteousness?
- Where is your sense of worth?

If Jesus is not the answer to all three of these questions, you are losing sight of the gospel. If Jesus is not the answer to all three of these questions, you will never know the kind of joy that Paul calls us to in this letter.

Look Out!

Paul begins his discussion of the gospel with a warning. Three times in verse 2 you find this phrase, “*Look out!*” You can translate this phrase with the word “*Beware!*” “*Look out! . . . Look out! . . . Look out! . . . Beware! . . . Beware! . . . Beware!*” As you look at these three warnings, it may surprise you at the strong language Paul uses here. When you go back to Philippians 1 and you hear Paul talk about those who are preaching Christ out of a sense of rivalry, Paul is gracious in his response to them. Sure, whatever these personality clashes were, it may bring personal hurt towards Paul. But as long as they are preaching Christ, he can deal with it. But in this case, there are teachers who are distorting the gospel and Paul uses strong words to address them. Paul has no room for teachers in the church who distort the gospel. He says, “*Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh.*”

Who is Paul referring to here? With these three warnings, he is not referring to three different groups of people. These three warnings point to the same group of people. In fact, this issue Paul addresses here is an issue he had to constantly address no matter where he went. When he says in verse 1, “*To write the same things again is no trouble to me . . .*” is so true because Paul wrote about this danger to the message of the gospel over and over again. This was one of the major challenges of the early church. The group Paul is warning them about is a group known as the Judaizers.

Judaizers were those of Jewish descent who recognized Jesus to be the promised Messiah. They too were persuaded with the message that Jesus rose from the dead. Surely, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead changes everything. Paul concluded in that wonderful hymn about Jesus in Philippians 2 that Jesus is Lord and that his name is above every name. Through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead we know that there is atonement for sin and death is defeated. But the offer of atonement for sin was not confined to the people of Israel . . . “*For God so loved the world.*” In fact, the final

instructions of Jesus before he ascended to heaven was that his followers were to be witnesses to this great news starting in Jerusalem, spreading to Judea, then to Samaria and then expanding to *the end of the earth*. So it is just a matter of time before Gentiles start responding in faith to the promise of the forgiveness of sin that there is in Jesus. It was just a matter of time before Gentiles and Jews who respond in faith to Jesus, became part of the people of God. But these Judaizers had a hard time making this transition. They insisted that if Gentiles wanted to be part of the people of God, they needed to go one step further and adopt the Jewish practices, including the rite of circumcision. That is why Paul warns the church at Philippi to look out for the *mutilators of the flesh*. So their message was that you needed Jesus plus circumcision to be saved. You needed Jesus plus the law of Moses to be part of the people of God. As soon as the gospel is Jesus plus anything . . . you lose the whole thing. The gospel is Jesus plus nothing.

It is hard for us to appreciate how difficult of a transition this was for the early Jewish believer in Christ. In the Old Testament, the chosen people of God was the people of Israel. The promise was made to their father, Abraham, that they would have many descendants and that through them, God would bring his blessing to his world. It was God who gave them the rite of circumcision as a sign of this covenant and this promise of God. But now Jesus, their Messiah has come, and he did things that they did not expect. They were surprised to see their Messiah go to the cross and die. And now they are surprised that God is forming a new people, a new *Israel of God* (Galatians 3:16) made of Jew and Gentile. They shouldn't be surprised at this because the Old Testament prophets spoke of this day. Isaiah said of this of the coming Messiah in Isaiah 49:6, "*It is too light of a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.*"

And so Paul says in verse 3, "*for we are the true circumcision.*" That is a strong statement he is making to these Judaizers. What he is saying is that we, Jew and Gentile together, the church of Christ . . . we are the people of God. It is we, "*who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus*" who are made into the people of God. It is not an outward circumcision of the flesh that makes you a part of God's people, it is a circumcision of the heart. It is something that God does in our hearts through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul says in this way in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, "*For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.*" This gospel is the power of God for salvation to all who believe. So Paul is glad to remind them that true faith is faith in Jesus plus nothing else. It is Christ alone!

Where is your confidence?

So here is our first question this morning, “where is your confidence?” In other words, what are you trusting in to commend yourself to God? How do you try to find God’s approval and God’s smile on your life?

Do you try to earn God’s favor by the way you live? Paul says at the end of verse 3, “*put no confidence in the flesh.*” In other words, you can’t earn God’s smile on your life. There is nothing you can do that causes God to be indebted to you. I love what Paul says in verse 4, “*though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more.*” In other words, if there was anyone who had a list they could present to God that you would think would count for something, it was Paul. Look at his resume: “*circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.*” Go ahead and check out Ancestry.com, he is as Jewish as they come. He received the sign of the covenant, circumcision, when he was supposed to. He was conservative religious leader. He was zealous for God. He kept all the rules. You couldn’t get more religious than Paul. And yet, Paul says, “*put no confidence in the flesh.*”

Why? Well what did we discover when we looked at the Ten Commandments? There is no one who keeps the commandments. That is Paul’s point to the religious Jew in Romans 2. They have the commandments but they fail to keep them. And so Paul says in Romans 2:25, “*For circumcision is of value if you keep the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision.*” And so at the end of the day, Paul concludes in Romans 3 that *there is no one righteous, no, not one . . . no one does good, not even one.*”

David Brooks, in his book, *The Road to Character*, writes about these rare people he has met whom he considers to be “good people.” Do you know what he found to be the common character trait in all of these people? They had a keen sense of what he called their “core sin.” They knew their sin and it made them humble. And so you may have a list of “good things” longer than my list of “good things” you might want to offer to God. But at the end of the day, when our hearts are quiet, I think we all know the sin that lives inside of us. “*He who is without sin, let him cast the first stone.*” No one threw a stone. And so, I have no confidence in my flesh. My sin condemns me.

Your only confidence can be in Jesus, who died for your sins. In Hebrews 4:16 we are

told that because Jesus is our high priest, “*Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace to find help in the time of need.*” In Hebrews 10:19 we read, “*Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus . . . Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*” Our confidence of God’s acceptance and approval is not found in what we do, but it is found in the grace that comes through faith in Jesus Christ. It is a confidence that allows me to say at the Communion Table, “as sure as you hold this bread and this cup in your hand, you can be sure—you can be confident—that if you come to this table with faith in Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven and God’s smile is upon you.” Where is your confidence?

Where is your righteousness?

This leads us to our second question. Where is your righteousness? This is a critical question because, somehow, I have to be made right with God. This question assumes that God in his holiness can’t simply overlook my sin. God can’t ignore my sin and simply sweep it under the rug as if it doesn’t exist. Something has to be done with my sin. Somehow, I need to be made right with God.

Where is your righteousness? Look how Paul answers that question starting at the end of verse 8, “*in order 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 comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.*” Paul says that this righteousness does not come from the law. Why is that? Because none of us can keep the law of God. The purpose of the law is to reveal our sin. Well if none of us can keep the law of God, how can we be righteous in God’s eyes? If our righteousness is dependent upon the law, there is no hope for any of us, for *there is none righteous, no not one*. But here is the good news of the gospel; what we can not do for ourselves, Jesus has done for us. He was tempted in every way we are, and yet was without sin. He is the righteousness of God for us. And so God graciously gives us the righteousness of Jesus when we come to him by faith. We have *the righteousness from God that depends on faith*. When Jesus went to the cross, your sin was placed on Jesus. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:21, “*For our sake he made him [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*” In other words, when we come to faith in Christ, his righteousness is given to us and God no longer sees our sin.

There is no one here this morning who has a leg up on anyone else when it comes to your standing before God. The moment you think that your sin is not as damning as

someone else's sin, you are guilty of the same distortion of the gospel as these Judaizers. No one here has an ounce of goodness to offer to God to diminish your need for total grace. That also means if you feel that you don't measure up to those sitting around you this morning and perhaps you feel that there is way too much water under the bridge of your life to possibly redeem it before God, you are actually in a better place than the "good church goer" who may be sitting next to you in their sense of self-righteousness. You are exactly where God wants you this morning. You know your sin! All you need to do is repent of that sin and turn in faith to Jesus and God will give you the righteousness of Jesus and you will be cleansed of all your sin.

Where is your righteousness? It is not in yourself. It is found in Jesus.

Where is your worth?

This brings us to our final "gospel question." Where is your worth? What do you value in life? Paul says in verse 7, "*But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain.*" All those things he once thought counted for something, all those things that he once thought he could put on the positive side of the ledger to put himself in good standing before God are nothing but *rubbish* to him. That term *rubbish* is somewhat sugar coated for us in the English. It can be translated as "dung" or "excrement from the body." Or it can refer to table scraps that are thrown away after a feast, perhaps what is unfit for human consumption and thrown to the dogs. All these things he once trusted in are of no worth. And so my worth, my value, my identity in life is found in Jesus Christ. There is nothing greater in all of life than knowing Jesus Christ.

The invitation of the gospel, at the end of the day, is not an invitation to a philosophy. Nor is it simply an invitation to a set of beliefs. Rather, it is an invitation to a vital relationship with the living God. It is an invitation to know God and to be known by God. Paul says in verse 10, "*that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*"

When you come to faith in Jesus, you enter into relationship with Jesus and the beauty of it is that he changes our lives. To know him in the power of his resurrection means that we do experience victory over our sin. The law of God, the love for God and the

love for others, begins to grow inside of us and we are forever changed. To know him in the fellowship of his suffering recognizes that our victory over sin does require us to die to ourselves and our sinful desires. There is sacrifice in that process. But God has given us his Spirit, his Word, his church, the Lord's table, prayer. . . . All these things are given to us that we might grow in knowing Jesus. But we do all these things, not to earn God's smile, but because we already have God's smile in Christ and so there is nothing greater in life than knowing Jesus Christ. Jesus becomes our worth and our identity in life.

Conclusion

Where is your confidence? It is in Jesus.
Where is your righteousness? It is in Jesus.
Where is your worth? It is in Jesus.

This is why Paul is able to say, while sitting under house arrest in Rome, "*Finally, my brothers, Rejoice in the Lord!*" Because of Jesus, we have confidence to approach God. Because of Jesus, we are given a righteousness from God. Because of Jesus, we have what is of surpassing value in all the world. Nothing can take that away. Prison can't take that away. Your current struggle with sin can't take that away. Nor can the threat of death take that away. Jesus already conquered death.

Do you know what I have come to notice in life about joy? There are a lot of people who aren't sitting in prison or aren't facing the prospect of death, and still this joy alludes them. Or joy is something that is chased from one amusement to the next or from one accomplishment to the next or from one relationship to the next. But when the amusement is over, or that accomplishment is achieved or that relationship doesn't fill the void; it leaves them looking for the next thing that will bring to them that sense of joy. The call of the text is to find your joy in the Lord. Why? Because only Jesus can bring you lasting joy. Jesus is the fuel your soul was made to run on. So don't add anything to Jesus to find your joy in life.

Jesus is your confidence. Jesus is your righteousness. Jesus is your worth. Repent of your sin, Put your trust in what Jesus has done for you through his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. Submit to him as the ruler of your life. He will change you from the inside out and you will know joy that transcends your circumstance. "*Finally, my brother, rejoice in the Lord!*" Remember the gospel.

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