

“The Great Exchange”

Philippians 3:1-9

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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Philippians 3:1-9

1 Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe. 2 Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! 3 For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, 4 though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; 6 concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. 7 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. 8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;



Paul, back in chapter 1, had called upon the church there in Philippi to “abound in love.” While so many of us want to manifest our faith by looking *inward*, Paul called upon these believers to live it *outward*. He sought... from himself and those to whom he writes, a “fruit from his spiritual labors.”

Paul...even there in the first century, already attempts to rid the church of the anti-biblical ideal that we should just look inward and ‘feel’ our Jesus love and presence, and that there is not an obligation or even real inclination to do anything for the kingdom at large. It’s the “comfortable Jesus” movement: *let’s just gather together and talk about how we feel.*

Paul also knew that some would *and will* invariably take the road of strife and division...if the pastor calls it white, they will call it black. It is the destructive effects of pride and self-love. He called upon the believers to have a conduct that is “worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ.” One that speaks of a faithful response from us in real life living. He had called for humility, other centered love, and service to others. He told us not to complain and to be examples to the world, of Christ and the faith. He called for us to render forth a ‘sacrifice and service of our faith.’ Now he will give us a very real warning...*in blunt and clear terms*, of those who would come to try to move us off that path.

3:1

In typical pastoral fashion, Paul starts with the word “finally” and then he talks for two more chapters! After all that he has said...*maybe we could even say despite all he has said*, Paul still felt justified in being joyous and calls us to the same; “Rejoice in the Lord.” There are two things that will constantly and continually come at us

as believers: circumstances and false doctrine. Some, because of the lack of the Spirit's control, will constantly be distracted, confused, and floundering. Joy is the natural attribute of those who let Jesus run the show.

Apparently, the things Paul had been saying to them was not new. But he knew that we all need to be reminded because sadly, we all tend to forget over time. We need to stop and point out again here that Paul was in prison at the time of this writing. So obviously, his joy was not based upon his circumstances. This 'attribute' or 'trait' is one of the litmus tests of real faith and Spirit leading.

I know some folks who claim salvation but they are always sad and angry! How can we say God dwells within us and have such a demeanor? I'm not saying any one of us is perfect in this area...we all have bad days when our humanity and self-interest get the best of us, but some folks are constantly 'in a foul mood.' If you haven't a real joy in your life, how can you say you have Christ? For *our* 'rejoicing' is not in our circumstances, anymore that they were for Paul: it is to be "in the Lord." That mean that despite any hardships...come 'hell or high water', we still have Christ, today and forever...and that:

"An attitude of joy would help the believers safeguard against the practices Paul so vehemently warned against: dissension, grumbling, and attitudes of superiority. If we lose the joy of the Lord, we are susceptible to these attitudes. Joy acts as a barrier against them. It guarantees the safety of our Christian hope." Life Application Concise New Testament Commentary

3:2

"Beware of dogs..."

Whoa, that's some serious language there Paul! Clearly his demeanor changes dramatically here. We can assume therefore that whatever is behind this change is some serious stuff as far as he is concerned!

Let me say upfront that I'm with Paul on this. Some people do not endear me to niceties nor do some situations encourage me to soft-petal my reaction. Sometimes when someone is careening off a cliff I am inclined to yell "Dude! You're heading for a cliff!" and not schedule an appointment to discuss the issue over coffee! Nor am I apt to 'warm my hands around the fires' of those who eat sheep and spit out the bones. Frankly, I am forever astonished at some people's offended egos when they were scolded for burning down the house.

Indeed there is a time for mercy, patience, and compassion. But there is also a time to 'throw-down.' Jesus had his, Paul had his, Peter had his, Moses, Elijah, etc.

Paul knew that false doctrine and false teachers would be unrelenting. As soon as one such garbage is debunked, another one comes down the pike. As soon as one wolf is dealt with, another sneaks in the back door. And some people...lacking the Holy Spirit's control, just invariably fall for it over and over, again and again. Some people just love dirty laundry and look to make it so even when it is not. As soon as one of these wolves start talking, they pull up a chair for conversation and become 'Facebook buddies' with them, texting and emailing...hanging out. Its like we are just *looking* for a reason to disavow our church and its leaders.

These folks never get in the game. They never take their place in the body of Christ...they just constantly go contrary to everyone else because of their pride. Despite what looks to be a terminal ailment, Paul warns them just the same! And He does so in strong "you're heading for cliff!" language.

Jesus Himself had a little to say about this himself in Matthew chapter 7. "*Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.*" (Matthew 7:6)

“Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves. You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act. Can you pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?” (Matthew 7:15-16)

Peter too, throws in on this:

“While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: “A dog returns to his own vomit,” and, “a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.” (1 Peter 2:19-22)

The prophet Isaiah describes them as:

...they are greedy dogs which never have enough. And they are shepherds who cannot understand; They all look to their own way, Every one for his own gain, From his own territory.

Matthew Henry remarks: *It seems to be this to which the apostle here seems to refer. Dogs, for their malice against the faithful professors of the gospel of Christ, barking at them and biting them. They cried up good works in opposition to the faith of Christ; but Paul calls them evil workers: they boasted themselves to be of the circumcision; but he calls them the concision: they rent and tore the church of Christ, and cut it to pieces.*

3:3

Paul points out that those who were the true “circumcision” were not necessarily those who had the physical mark of circumcision, but rather those who had “circumcised the heart.” In Romans 2:29 Paul clarifies this issue by saying: *“but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.”* Deut 10:16 calls upon us to *“Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.”*

The Jews were trying to be right with God through a physical act. But the Bible says they have it backwards. Our physical actions...*while indeed important*, follow **after** a righteous heart and commitment! It will never happen the other way around! True circumcision is spiritual, not physical; inward, not outward; reality, not a rite.

What **about** our service? *“Christians practice priestly service in a spiritual ministry. Their service is inspired by the Holy Spirit, guided by the Holy Spirit, and supported by the Holy Spirit. Sacred service is of the heart, not by ordinances and traditions.”* KJV Commentary

These *“are things that we do because we worship; they are the result and activities of worship. They are not the basis or spirit of worship. True, they may help us to focus upon God and stir us to worship Him, but as stated, they are not the basis and spirit of worship.”* (Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible - Commentary)

True worship goes beyond praising God, singing hymns, or participating in a “worship service.” The essence of worship is living a life in tune...in obedience, to God. Indeed, *“Do not neglect doing good and sharing,”* exhorts the writer of Hebrews, *“for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”* (Heb 13:16). But we must understand that true worship involves every aspect of life. Chapter 2, verse 13 of this letter tells us how it works: *“God...working in (us), giving (us) the desire to obey Him and the power to do what pleases Him.”*

3:4-6

It would be easy for Paul to criticize others for believing and trusting in themselves if he himself had nothing in the flesh really going. But the fact is, when Paul came to Christ, he truly had it “goin’ on.” He was “the man.” He could have had such a different life! There was the right blood lineage...the right politics and a job that was well connected with the powerful and influential. He could have literally been anyone and gone anywhere. Thus for Paul, there was a lot to throw away...quite likely far more than we have to lose. But he walked away from it all that day on the Damascus road. How did he do it? How did he do what few of us seem able to do?

Well...perhaps it was a good trade? Maybe it was for the “blessed life” to follow? Ask Paul how his life with Christ panned out – it’s in 2 Cor 11:24-9: *Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been .. in danger from rivers, ... from bandits, ... from my own countrymen, ... from false brothers...* And yet the stark fact remains: when a man has a very real meeting with the Son of God, nothing else this world has will compare ever again.

3:7-8

Paul “traded.” He made the “great exchange.” Not just the *one time* but every day since then. Paul says “I count *all things* loss...” It’s that position which separates those who had a momentary emotional event, and those who had a profound revelation. For Paul, it was all gone...he left it all. There was no negotiation that day on the Damascus road. It was a surrender.

This is Paul’s “profit and loss” statement: on one side, the *list* of things he left behind, and on the other, there was only *one* entry: Christ. He says he counted it all gone. He says “I counted”... “I count”...and lastly, “I do count them” as *dung* as the old king James renders it. We would have our own rendering for that in today’s vernacular.

Paul wasn’t trying to paint a pretty picture to convince unbelievers. He was simply calling it straight. Indeed there was a cost involved. There was for Paul...and there will be for us too. There is no away around it...he had to make a trade. For Paul, it was not a hard trade, because to him...all that he left behind was *dung* in comparison.

How did a world that was seemingly so important at one time become excrement? The pastor and author Guy King says, “*All financial gain, all material gain, all physical gain, all intellectual gain, all moral gain, all religious gain—all these are no gains at all compared with the Great Gain.*” When we struggle with the personal cost, it is in truth because we don’t really believe that...we have never truly realized our own blindness, nor have we let Christ open our eyes anew. We don’t really grasp the cost of the cross, or the love that He has for us. So we instead spend our lives trying constantly to ‘cut a deal.’

Remember Lot's wife? She was unwilling to see what she was leaving as worth less than her rescue and so she lost everything. Jesus Himself tried to warn us: “*Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.*” (Luke 17:32, 33)

But for Paul, it all came down to this: “*For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*” Jim Elliott missionary martyr had the same attitude as Paul, writing that “He is no fool to give what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” When I know my Savior, my mind will be full to the brim...I will feel that I have that which my spirit seeks after. “This is that bread whereof if a man eat he shall never hunger.”

3:9

Paul had thus far in this chapter been warning the believers in Philippi to ‘beware of the wolves’ that were no doubt already knocking on the door. But the warning came with a reminder that the only way they will be able to fend these wolves off is to lean upon Christ and the ‘infilling’ of the Holy Spirit...the ‘comforter.’ He went on to elaborate that in order for that to occur...in order to be truly filled, controlled and defended by the Spirit of God, I must “*have no confidence in the flesh.*” I must actually surrender the control of my life and be living to and for that same spirit. Jesus is not to be ‘Batman’ that we call when we are in trouble, but rather a constant companion and we must be in submission to Him and His **Word...which is simultaneously Christ the Son of God as well as His written Word (...so says John chapter 1), ...in order for that to happen.**

When we reject his instruction, we reject Him. When we refuse his direction, we refuse His indwelling. When we deny his sovereignty and our obedience, we know no peace, no joy, no fruit of the Spirit.

Paul begins verse 9 by rolling off of verse 8, where he says “it’s all gone.” I have surrendered it all...my plans, my possessions, my earthly loves and passions,...everything. It’s all gone! Verse 9 begins with the result of that act... “and be found in Him.”

I often hear people continually claim... “*I really want to experience more of Christ...to get to know Him more...to feel His presence in my life.*” Yet those same folks can also be those same individuals who say no to His directions, and refuse His control! They are looking for a ‘new’ Jesus...a spirituality that denies the cross. They don’t want to be a servant. They want some sort of ‘groovy friendship’ with Jesus. But Jesus didn’t primarily come to be my friend, he came to be my Savior Redeemer **and my Lord.**

We must understand: The fact that such a position of “in Him” is even possible, is ***because of Christ.*** He made that union possible. But we must choose to be a part of that union! And we do so with our actions as much as we do so with our ‘heart.’ We ‘step forward’ and He embraces us!

Paul clarifies this idea in Galatians 2:20 saying: “*My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*” Can you today truly say that Christ is your life and that you find your true meaning and purpose in this life in Christ? In His service? In His presence and the presence of other members of His body?

Spurgeon drives home the issue: ‘This matter is like a balance, if one scale goes down, the other must go up. The weightier Christ’s influence, the lighter will be the world and self-righteousness; and when Christ is all in all, then the world and self will be nothing at all.’ This influence speaks of effect. A ‘sway’ upon our actions and living. Mine is to but respond to Him, and if He is real to me, then respond I do!

There on the lake shore that day early in the gospels, Jesus asked Peter, James, and John to “come and follow me.” And they walked away from everything. They left it all. Family, vocation, comfort, security, social acceptance. They were all in. They had made that “great exchange.”

A real faith is tangible: it moves! For real faith is a not just a mental assent to truth ...but a living out of God's revelation of Truth. It is a personal surrender to that Truth and a conduct which reflects such a surrender! If this is not a fact in you, then James says your faith is dead.

FILM: Made for something great
ALL IN
The Great Exchange