

The Joy of Knowing Christ – Summary Sheet

Philippians 3:1-11

Paul begins by reminding the Philippians of the theme of his letter: joy! Paul's joy is rooted in Jesus. He's learned to rejoice in God despite his situation. In the next chapter he'll tell the Philippians that he has learned to be content regardless of what's going on around him. If I base my joy in anything else other than God, then I won't be truly joyful. Jesus is the only "constant" in this life – make him your joy and it won't change with your mood!

Paul is warning his readers about a group of people called the Judiazers. These were an influential group of Jews who were going around teaching that, in order for a person to truly be right with God, they must obey the Old Testament Law as well as putting their faith in Jesus. Their doctrine was a mixture of grace and works. And so they polluted the message of grace and constantly undermined Paul's teaching. They taught a false gospel. He calls them dogs – like wild, dangerous animals that tear and devour people. Salvation is provided as a free gift and there's nothing we can do to earn it or to add to it! Any other created system of works where people think they're going to heaven is false. Living a moral life won't bring God's favour on you, simply helping other people, or doing acts of charity or giving blood or recycling – all good things, but they're not going to make you right with God. All we need is Jesus, and as one preacher puts it, 'Jesus plus anything ruins everything.' And that's exactly what these Judiazers were teaching: that you needed Jesus plus circumcision.

But Paul says the 'true circumcision' are those who trust entirely in Jesus Christ for their salvation, not people who just mutilate the flesh. They were boasting because of their circumcision and education and obedience to the law and Paul says it's worthless but if anyone has a right to boast it's him. He was top dog. He had the heritage. But he says compared to knowing Jesus it's pointless anyway. His lineage, his qualifications, his prestige, his zeal, his success, his own best efforts, he says he counts it all as rubbish, when he compares it to knowing Jesus.

Paul is not saying however, that all our efforts and our success at work, the reputation that we have is simply rubbish. He's saying compared to knowing Jesus it is. And it's rubbish in the sense that it can't save you! Paul says that he used to trust in this stuff and value it so highly but now he trusts in Christ. He's all we need. God says that all our efforts to make ourselves right with him are like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). That's why God sent his son Jesus Christ to save us.

We are saved by grace through faith. Theologians call this justification by faith – and it's basically this: my sin goes to Jesus. Jesus' righteousness comes to me. My sin goes to Jesus, and Jesus' sinlessness and perfection comes to me. Jesus goes to the cross and he takes my place and we trade places.

As a result of this grace, we receive new life and we get to know Jesus, to become more like him. In fact, the power that can take a dead body and cause it to rise from the grave is in you – the Holy Spirit. He's at work in us, giving us new desires. He gives strength to change – this is sanctification.