

Week 7: To Know Him

Chapter 3:1-11

So far... we've seen Paul's affection towards the Philippian church, and his desire for them to grow in Gospel-centred love. Paul testifies to his desire to boldly glorify Jesus whether by life or by death, and then urges the church to humble Gospel-centred unity. He calls them to shine like stars in the darkness of the world, following the example of Jesus Himself, and also the examples of other men like Timothy and Epaphroditus.

To Know Him

"...I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." (3:8)

Having called the Philippian church to some profoundly life-changing attitudes and obedience, Paul now moves on to talk about the heart of what it means to be a Christian. He makes it as clear as he can that true Christianity isn't about the kind of religious observance that once characterised Paul's life. He gives us his list of religious achievements and status, but tells us that he now counts it all as absolute rubbish - of no worth whatsoever. There is something available to us that is so much deeper and greater than the outward appearance of simple religious observance - and that is to know Jesus.

What is the single most important distinguishing feature of any man or woman in the world - it isn't their language or colour of their skin. It isn't their education or social class, and it isn't even how good or upright their life looks. The single most important feature of any human being is whether they know Jesus or not. You can be as outwardly religious as you want - go to church, pray, study the Bible and embrace all the other rituals that go along with religion and it all means nothing unless you have come into a relationship with Jesus.

So what does this reality mean for us? It first of all means we must ask the question - do I really know Jesus or has my idea of the Christian faith all been about the outward appearance? To be a Christian doesn't mean to be pursuing favour with God by what we do, rather it means to be working out what a life looks like in relationship with Jesus. It doesn't mean to be working towards something, but living out of a place of security.

It also has a life-changing impact on the kinds of things we devote our time to. No longer do we need to pursue rituals and religious forms that may look spiritual in appearance but actually are useless in accomplishing anything of worth (Colossians 2:23). Our primary concern is to live in fellowship with Jesus and with His people, and allow those relationships to influence and affect all that we do. Living in relationship with Jesus will cause us to develop a real righteousness - not outward and empty, but inward and marked by genuine love.

For Discussion:

What does it look like to pursue relationship with Jesus and not religion?

Other Verses for study:

- John 1:1-13
- John 14:15-23
- John 17:1-3

The Righteousness of Faith

"...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" (3:8-9)

A huge part of the difference between the religious observance that Paul has left behind in his old life and the real relationship with Jesus that he now pursues is the idea of where righteousness comes from. In a purely religious system righteousness is primarily earned by the actions of those living in the system, and for Paul it was also conferred on him to a degree because of his national heritage. The bottom line is that it all has to do with that which is outward, that which can potentially be faked and can all be a source of pride for the person who has built up this kind of status. This is the kind of life that would easily earn the respect of those around you, especially in a more religious-minded culture.

In his former life, Paul would most likely have been well respected, honoured, maybe even revered because of his strict adherence to the Jewish law and his dedication to what he thought was the religion of his fathers. In many ways it still works exactly this way - very often the motivation for a persons religion is heavily influenced by the view of others around them. As people we naturally want the

praise of men and can create a whole persona purely for that reason, even when sitting in church.

However, this isn't the kind of righteousness God wants for us - He wants us to receive the righteousness that comes by faith, a righteousness that depends entirely on Jesus' finished work on the cross and not on our own performance. No longer do we need to be so concerned with our outward appearance because we know that all our human religious efforts actually amounts to nothing in the sight of God, and that's the same for everyone.

We all desperately need the grace of God shown to us in Jesus, and once we have received that grace we can then truly rest. The righteousness of faith gives a real security because we know that we never earned it for ourselves and so can't possibly un-earn it . It's a gift that will never be taken from us and so frees us to pursue a real righteousness, for the glory of God, and not for the praise of men.

For Discussion:

What fruits will depending on the 'righteousness of faith' bring in our lives?

Other Verses for study:

- Psalm 32:1-5
- Romans 3:21-4:8
- 2 Cor 5:16-21

Resurrection Power

"that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death" (3:10)

As Paul continues to describe the life that he is now pursuing, leaving behind the empty religion that once was so important to him, he begins to describe something of what that new life looks like. He speaks of his desire to experience the very power of God that raised Jesus from the dead - what could sound more attractive than that to a follower of Jesus? Who wouldn't want the dynamic power displayed in Jesus' resurrection flowing in them and through them - surely if that was the case then truly nothing would be impossible for one of God's children.

However as Paul goes on, he speaks in a way that might be surprising to those who are rejoicing over the promise of great power at work in the life of a believer. You see the power that God gives His people in this world isn't just about miracles, healing, and performing great acts of daring faith. Rather than speaking about these kinds of things, Paul immediately starts to speak about suffering and death, subjects you'd far easier relate to defeat and weakness rather than victory and power. However

this gives us an idea exactly what the power of God is available for us to do.

Think about Jesus - when He started to perform miracles and display great power, people naturally gravitated to Him because of their desire for Him to lead them and blow away the Roman rule they had endured for years. However Jesus always knew that wasn't why He'd come - He'd primarily come to die in shame and seeming defeat, and in doing so was displaying the power of God to defeat sin and set His people free.

So too for us - let's not forget that ultimate victory will one day come, but for now God calls us to be empowered so that we too could give our lives away. So we can identify ourselves with Jesus Himself in the way He suffered, and be given the strength to take up our own cross, die to self and in doing so glorify God and accomplish His plans here on earth.

For Discussion:

What does it look like for us to be strengthened by the power of God to give our lives away?

Other Verses for study:

- Romans 6:1-14
- 1 Peter 4:1-11