The Joy of Knowing Christ
Philippians 3:1-11

So we're exactly half way through our study in Philippians this morning! You know Paul has to be a preacher, because although he's only half way through his letter he begins by saying '*finally...!*' But he's still got another two chapters to go yet! Anyway, this morning I get the privilege of preaching on a fairly familiar passage to many of you. The second half of it particularly, will contain verses that you probably know or have memorized; where Paul talks about how he counts everything worthless compared to knowing Jesus. A sentiment that we all want to share. I'm excited to get into the study of God's word this morning but before we do, please join me in prayer.

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 might 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.*

(Philippians 3:1-11, ESV)

And so Paul begins by reminding the Philippians of the theme of his letter: joy! 17 times in 4 small chapters, Paul talks about rejoicing, being content, being joyful. And so he begins, *Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.* Remember where Paul is when he's writing this? He's in prison, in fact he's chained to a guard 24/7. But he's joyful, he's rejoicing, not in his circumstances, but because his 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. He's learned to cultivate joy.

For most of my life, my joy has been based on my circumstances. As long as I'm fit and healthy, as long as the bank balance looks good, as long as my family are all doing well, as long as I feel I have purpose and as long as I finished in the top ten in Saturdays bike race, then life is good – and I'm happy! But those things don't produce lasting joy. Why? Because I'm rejoicing in the wrong thing! If I base my joy in anything else other than God, then I won't be truly joyful. Those things I mentioned: family, health, finances, sport and leisure – they're all good

things and we should definitely rejoice in the blessings God gives us, but unfortunately, as we all know, they're subject to change on a daily basis! They go up and down, and so inevitably they're going to affect my mood – as long as things are going right I'm happy! But as soon as they're not, I'm unhappy! So Paul says, don't rejoice in happenings, learn to rejoice in the Lord, who is the same yesterday, today and forever. Jesus is the only "constant" in this life! He says there in verse 1, *it's no trouble to write the same things again*, because we all need to be reminded to rejoice in the Lord.

And so, after this short reminder, Paul changes his subject completely, or as our Pastor, Martin would say, 'he makes a complete knights move!' In fact, Paul's tone changes pretty drastically in this part of his letter. Up until this point, it's been very kind, very gentle, but in verse 2, we see a pretty angry Paul. Except he's not angry with the Philippians he's writing to. Rather, he 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. Basically, they couldn't accept grace - the idea of God's salvation being offered freely to those who believe in Jesus. They told people that it was Jesus plus what you do that saves you. In fact they went further than that. They told people that they must become Jewish first, and be circumcised and then they could come to Christ. Their doctrine was a mixture of grace and works. And so they polluted the message of grace and constantly undermined Paul's teaching. Paul is understandably angry about this false gospel and feels he needs to warn the church. He loves these guys too much not to caution them. And so he writes, verse 2:

2 Look out for the dogs (referring of course to the judiazers), *look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh.*

Strong language from Paul! He calls them dogs! Now, when you hear the word dog, especially if you're Swiss, you probably think 'awww, that's nice, a little doggy that I can put in my handbag and take round Migros!' But he's not talking about those kinds of dogs! He's talking about wild dogs that run free; eat corpses; urinate everywhere, chase people; wild, dangerous dogs. They're the kind of dogs the Philippians had in mind when Paul used the word dog. Paul's language is strong because he's not going to let these judiazers pollute the message of the gospel: that Jesus Christ has purchased our salvation on the cross and there's nothing we can do to earn that forgiveness from God, but receive it through faith by grace. What these judiazers are teaching is no gospel at all. It's religion and religion tells you what you have to do to earn God's favour. In fact, that's what every religion says. How can I earn God's favour? And that's why I don't like it when Christianity gets lumped with all other religions! Because it's so different – in fact it's the opposite – it's very basis is that there's nothing we can do to earn God's favour, but rather, God came down to Earth to rescue us, even when we were in a helpless state. He doesn't wait for us to clean up our act! 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. I'm sorry to say it, but living a moral life wont 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.

Now, actually it was God who instituted circumcision. In Genesis 17, God called a man named Abraham to a relationship with him. And God told him to circumcise himself as a symbol, but only as a symbol, of the covenant relationship that he had with him. And so from then on, God's people in the Old Testament, the Jewish people, had their boys circumcised 8 days after they were born, as commanded by God, as an outward sign of being in relationship with Him. It was a sign that the Jewish people used in the Old Testament to say, "I'm a believer. I am in a covenant with God." But circumcision was never meant to be something you could do to earn God's favour. The Jews didn't earn their salvation by paying for it with circumcision. But these Judiazers were saying "You must believe in Jesus and be circumcised as well." And so Paul is saying "no no no! You're missing the point of circumcision!" In fact, Paul wont even call what they are doing circumcision. He says they are just 'mutilating their flesh.' They're missing the point of circumcision altogether. In verse 3 he says,

3 we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh –

He's telling the Philippians that true followers of Christ (the 'circumcision' – the people of God) are those who trust entirely in Jesus Christ for their salvation. The act of circumcision is no longer necessary, now that the Messiah Jesus has come. So you boys don't need to worry this morning! It's not Jesus plus circumcision, nor is it Jesus plus good works, it's not even Jesus plus good church attendance or Jesus plus speaking in tongues or Jesus plus baptism that saves us. As Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us, it's by grace through faith and there's nothing we can do to add to it! That's why Paul says in 1 Cor 1:31 that we make our boast in Christ alone. We can't put any confidence in ourselves! Anytime you take the focus off Jesus Christ and what he did on the cross and put it on yourself and what you need to do in order to earn your own salvation, you are putting confidence in your flesh (basically in yourself), and Paul says it's worthless. And anyway, Paul says, as far as earthly resumes go, if that's what it was even about, which is defiantly is not, I'd beat you all!

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.

Paul's saying "You know my pedigree: a proper Jew is there ever was one! An Israelite from the elite tribe of Benjamin. Circumcised on the eighth day; strict and devout, a meticulous observer of everything in the Law Book." He was top dog. He had the heritage. But he says "Listen, these credentials that the Judaizers

think are something so special, I'm throwing them in bin (or trash for you Americans!) – I couldn't care less about them now that I know Jesus! Or all the other stuff I used to take credit for, forget about it. Verse 7:

7 But whatever gain I had, I count 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.

Rubbish! 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. You don't see that word used often in the Bible – rubbish! You hear it a lot in England! But you don't see it used anywhere else in the Bible. Only here! And the reason is because the word that Paul actually used here in the Greek language would be better translated into a word that I ought not to use in church, or at all for that matter! Especially when my job is at stake! But suffice it to say that Paul was looking for the most disgusting term he could think of when comparing all of his gifts and abilities and achievements to the value of knowing Jesus, and he uses a term that means, to use a more polite expression "dog poo." So he's in keeping with his theme of dogs! If anyone could boast, humanly speaking, it was Paul, and yet he says it's all a load of dog poo…when I compare it to knowing Jesus.

Are we to think then that all that we've worked for, all that we went to college for – our education, our qualifications, our achievements. All our efforts and our success at work, the reputation that we have, it's all just a big pile of dog poo? No, that's not what Paul is saying at all. We have to see it in context. You see Paul had thought that he could rely on his resume to put him in God's good books. He thought that he could depend on his achievements and his religious education and zeal to stand before God on judgment day. He was planning on presenting his religious dedicated life before Almighty God for entry into heaven.

I mean we only have to talk to any 'moral' person out there and what will you hear? "Well I would say I'm generally a good person. Not perfect but not bad. I'm a good father, husband, sister, and colleague. I help others out, I don't lie at the office, I'm not an alcoholic, I never did drugs. In fact I'm well educated and well raised - I contribute to science, to discoveries, to the community…" Paul's not saying any of this stuff is wrong! It's all good stuff, but none of it is going to earn you God's favour and in that sense it's a pile of animal refuse in comparison to knowing Christ Jesus. Paul's saying, "I had a resume to beat all resumes! But after my encounter with Jesus I realize it's all totally worthless compared to him! Now I just trust in him. He's all I need for salvation.

And that's the plain and simple, clear teaching of scripture. It's offensive to some, especially because we're so used to earning rewards, but it's not possible to earn God's grace. God says that all our efforts to make ourselves right with him are like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). That's the best thing we can come up with in trying to save ourselves and make ourselves right with him apart from Jesus.

We fall way short of his standard. We stand before God condemned, even the very best resume is not good enough! There is no way we could plead our morality or our church attendance or our passion. That's why God sent his son Jesus Christ. Paul says it this way in verse 9:

9 and to 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-

Jesus descended from heaven to earth to live a perfect life so he could be a perfect sacrifice. He died the death that I should have died and he paid the penalty for all my sin and he rose on the third day for my salvation. And we can trust him completely. In fact it's all we can do. Theologians call it justification by faith – and it's basically this: my sin goes to Jesus. Jesus' righteousness comes to me. Martin Luther called it "The Great Exchange." 2 Corinthians 5:21, explains, "God made him" – that's Jesus – "who knew no sin" – he was perfect (he was God) – to become sin; he took all my sin upon himself– "so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." That's the exchange: 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. There is no greater truth in the universe! This changes everything! And Paul knows it:

—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.

As a result of this grace, we receive new life and we get to know Jesus, to become more like him. We get to know the power of his resurrection – the power that raised Jesus from the dead is the same power that is in us! Have we ever stopped to consider that? This power that can take a dead body and cause it to rise from the grave is in you. What does that mean for us this morning? It means he's at work in us, giving us new desires. Ever feel like you don't have the strength to say no to sin, that you just can't stop losing your temper? That you just can't kick a habit or stop lying or let go of bitterness or forgive that person? The truth is you can't! But the same power that Jesus Christ from the dead; the power of the Holy Spirit can give you that strength. Strength to forgive, strength to kick the habit, strength to think positively, strength to stop worrying, stop lying, stop lusting after things that you don't have! He gives us an ability that we don't possess in ourselves. He changes our life from the inside out. This is what theologians call sanctification. Justification is being declared righteous by God. That is a one-time act. We receive a new standing with God in the courtroom! The hammer goes down and we are declared innocent forever because of Jesus. And then the Holy Spirit is given to us and begins to change us and make us more like our Saviour – Jesus Christ. And that is a gradual process that the bible calls sanctification.

In fact the Holy Spirit gives us a new perspective altogether! Paul says even the way we understand suffering changes. God will even use suffering to make me more like Jesus. Even the hard times, the times of suffering and questioning are

opportunities for our sanctification - to become more and more like Jesus. We have a new life and a new perspective. The same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead is working in us and making us more like Jesus.

And that's why Paul is still joyful even though he's chained to a guard in prison and will most likely be executed, that's why he's been able to remain joyful though hungry, homeless, thirsty, through beatings, shipwrecks and rejection, because through Jesus he's received new life and that has true meaning and purpose. It means he can rest in God. That he doesn't have to work for his salvation, but can joyfully work because of it. That's why he says in the previous chapter, *to live is Christ and to die is even better!* He knows that his future is secure in God's hands because of Christ and that any suffering or difficulty in this life is all working towards to his sanctification. That's why he's willing to contend with the Judiazers over these matters and that's why he tells the Philippians to rejoice! Salvation is in Jesus Christ alone. Everything else is worthless compared to knowing him. Truly, *everything else is nothing compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord.*