**I want to know Christ personally** **(Phi 3:1-21)**

A dear woman of God I know inherits her parents’ furniture when they passed away several years ago. This nice furniture she now owns has sentimental value. She has become attached to it. Recently, however, she changes her mind to sale her furniture and give money to African mission. She values children in Africa more than her beautiful furniture. In today’s passage, Paul said about a similar thing that he believes all his human achievements are a loss. He considers every accomplishment to be like the garbage in the New Yor city dumpster, comparing it with the privilege of knowing Christ personally. To know Christ includes present suffering and future glory for us. This is the main point we want to meditate on next 25 minutes or so. Key verse is 3:10.

I am going to read verse 1 from our NIV Bible translation from 1983. “Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.” The adverb “finally” marks a transition Paul wanted to emphasize in this letter, not a conclusion. “Rejoice in the Lord” is Paul’s encouragement to remain strong from the influence of the Judaizers. Here we see that the foundation of our Christian joy is to be found in the Lord. Paul’s repetition means because it was for their safety from the bad influence. Look at verse 2. Three strong warnings are here: “dogs,” “evildoers,” and mutilators of the flesh.” These warning signs refer to Jewish Christians who insisted the Gentile believers be circumcised. What did Paul say about circumcision? Circumcision may have looked attractive to the Jewish Christian for their reason to be accepted into society. However, in defense of the gospel, circumcision was not necessary for a Gentile to become Christian.

Look at verse 3. “For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, who put no confidence in the flesh,” Paul claimed that we are the circumcision, including himself with the believers in Philippi. Paul’s claim on three items: “we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, who put no confidence in the flesh.” First, the word “serve” is about their devotion to God, evidenced by how they live before him. Thus, “serve” has to do with “righteousness,” which reflects God’s likeness and character in daily Christian living—for example, looking for the interest of others as modeled by Christ in emptying himself by taking the form of a slave (2:5-7). Such “service” in the life of believers powered by God’s indwelling of the Spirit is a million miles removed from “service” in the form of strictly observing the rules and regulations of a particular church tradition. We need such circumcision effected by the Spirit that will thus replace the cutting of the “flesh.”

Now Paul is up to playing a game of “loss and gain.” Verses 4-14 is Paul’s very own personal testimony. Look at verses 4-6. Paul had an impressive resume to his credit. He must have invested a lot of resources to build up such strong reputation. If it does any good, Paul could have relied on his certifications.  Look at verse 7. “But whatever were gains to me, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.” The word “loss” indicates something damaged or doesn’t work anymore or is of no further use. Those things that Paul thought necessary became unimportant after confronting the resurrected Messiah. Paul further describes the uselessness of his accomplishments, the things of the world, in verse 8. Here the word means anything detestable or worthless. All items of this world are dung compared to knowing Christ. Even our righteousness is filthy rags (Is. 64:6).

Paul considering his worldly accomplishments as garbage was a deliberate action taken on his part found in the following verses. “...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 is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God based on faith (8b-9).” Paul reiterated this idea from 1:21. The phrase that “I may know him” means to embrace him, and” be found in him” is to be adopted by him. Here Paul considered that to lose is to gain. All his life, Paul must have eagerly sought to have the righteousness of God so that he may find a proper way of living. All his effort failed. He realized that all his effort to observe the law was only making him self-righteous. We can see Paul’s frustration. But by faith through grace, he received the righteousness of God, which is the right way of living (Rom 1:17). God forgave all his sins, past, present, and future, a total freedom.

Moreover, he clothed him with his righteousness so that Paul could embrace the right way of living. By faith through Christ, Paul could now afford a right standing before the living God. Paul must have been blown away by this beautiful intimate relationship he had with God by faith. Paul would do anything if he only could maintain a relationship with God through Christ is what he meant when he said, “I now consider loss for the sake of Christ” in verse 7.

**Let’s read our 10 together. “I want to know Christ--yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.”** I want to know Christ means to know him personally. The word “yes” in the middle of the sentence emphasizes Paul’s single heart desire and his utmost devotion and determination to one and only one thing of knowing Christ in life. “Knowing Christ” is the ultimate of being in the right relationship with God. Knowing Christ affected believers in two ways: because the righteousness of God affected believers, we know him now in terms of both the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings.

Furthermore, his present knowledge makes him fully aware of the ultimate prize waiting for him in the final redemption. We have the living hope of the coming kingdom of God. We realize that our life is not just about what college to go to, what type of job I want to have, whom to marry, what promotion I get etc. It is not only about our daily chores like what movie I want to see, which new restaurant in town I want to visit this weekend. We do not want to be engulfed by the bare necessities of life though they are essential. We must dream big because our future glory is beyond our limited human comprehension. Paul argues that since we have such a glorious future, we should not settle with minor desires. We must enlarge our vision and dream big plunge into a productive living. Don’t you agree?

I want to talk about some practical aspects of verse 10.  First, the phrase “to know the power of the resurrection” implies the ongoing experience of the power of God in our daily living. We experience new life when we apply the power of his resurrection. Our life is never a dull moment. We have full of opportunities to experience the power of the resurrection by confronting life’s challenges along the way. For example, I went back to school at the age of 50. Learning Greek and Hebrew was almost impossible. Working full-time Liz and me and raising four children, it appeared that to finish doctoral study was a draconian task. At one point, I thought it was impossible. Then I remember Jesus’ word from John 11: 4 that says, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.” This word gave me the power of his resurrection, and I finished my study and graduated this past May for the glory of God. Do you think knowing Christ personally is just for nothing? The fact is we experience the power of his resurrection when our situation appears to be impossible. If it says power of resurrection it refers to one time event. But it says, “power of his resurrection” the power is available to us in our chaotic daily world.

Secondly, “participation in his sufferings” has two practical point: 1) We share our fellowship with other believers in their sufferings. I cannot forget when Boston UBF was going through trials after one of our coworkers passed away in an accident. Missionary Joy and David drove to Boston every week for three months. One day, missionary David told me that it involves cultural issue and I need a thick skin to endure. If I wanted to, I could make him a punching bag. Those words were comforting for me. In this way we share fellowship of suffering with one another. 2) The second point is to imitate Christ’s lifestyle to conform ours with his. The technical term for Christ-like is called “Cruciform existence.” It means to let go of a self-centered life in obedience to Christ. Many people like to follow Christ, but they are not willing to give up their petty desire. We call this “cheap grace.” We can find this kind of cheap grace everywhere. Do not envy them. To follow Christ is not cheap. We must stand our ground and make new decisions to let go of our petty desire. Elsewhere Paul said, “I die every day” he meant, he let go of his wishes and made a new decision to imitate Christ, and live a Christ-centered living, to obey him. So that he may experience Christ’s death in his daily living, this is what “Cruciform life” is about, which is true righteousness or the right way of living.

Let me tell you a story of a man I know personally. He was a high official in the state government. He gave up the privilege of a high-paying job and decided to go to the Solomon Islands in the Pacific as a Sunday school teacher missionary. While preparing to go as a missionary, he had a car accident. He broke several ribs; his body was wrapped and in the hospital. The whole community felt sorry for him. That time, one mature servant of God said to the man at his bedside. “Have you counted everything loss for Christ’s sake? Are you still holding something for your benefit?” It was a moment of truth for this man who gave up his lucrative career. In his hospital bed, he must have exposed hidden desire before the living God. This life-threatening accident turned out to be a life-transforming moment for this man of God and purified his heart in the hospital bed. He must have let go of a small hidden desire at the far corner of his heart and decided to live for Christ alone. Doctors repaired his broken ribs and restored the whole body. He went to the Solomon Islands as a humble Sunday school teacher. His testimony was far more potent than his humble life as a missionary. Even a mature Christian like this man had something to lose for Christ’s sake so that he could know Christ personally and the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings. Even the Apostle Paul was no exception. Look at verses 12-14. Paul did not settle with less; more than ever, he was looking ahead. “I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

In conclusion, we see that knowing Christ personally is a sheer grace of God. Who am I that I should have such a privilege to know Christ? He included even me! I will not exchange my utmost desire to know Christ with the cheaper goods like my doctorate. Knowing Christ for me is to have a personal relationship with God, experiencing the power of his resurrection in my daily living, and participation in his sufferings. The more challenges I encounter, the more opportunities are open for me to experience God’s power working with a mere man. I do not want to live by cheap grace; instead, I am even more determined to live a life that manifests a Christ-like lifestyle. **“Search me, God, and know my heart, test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is the offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting (Ps. 139:23-24)”** May God richly bless you!

*Interactive Study Guide*

1. What is the foundation of our Christian joy (1a)? What are the three things Paul warned Philippian Christians (2)? Why do true believers put no confidence in the flesh (3)?
2. What shows Paul worked hard all his youth to have a right relationship with God, but failed miserably (4-6)?
3. Read verses 7-8a. What does “for the sake of Christ” mean (7)? How did Paul intentionally decide to lose his past to gain his present, and have a future (8b-9a)? What was the choice, a petty inferior brand of righteousness or a redemptive relationship that comes from trusting Christ? (9b)?
4. What does to “know Christ” mean (10a)? How did Paul explain “knowing Christ” in verse 10b? How did Paul express his desire to go to any length if only he could experience the joy of the *newness* (resurrection) daily by knowing Christ (11)?