

A life worth losing

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Date: 31 December 2023

Preacher: Dan Johnston

[0 : 00] Let's pray. Father God, we are so thankful that we have your word, the Bible. And we pray, Lord, as we come to it this morning, that you would help us, equip us by your spirit to understand what it is that you want us to hear this morning.

Lord, we pray that we would push out any distractions that we might have so that we can focus fully on your word this morning. Lord, prepare our hearts, soften our hearts so that as we hear these familiar words, your spirit can penetrate our hearts and we can hear what it is you want us to hear this morning.

Also, Lord, personally, I ask for your help, that you would equip me and the words that I speak this morning would be from you and that anything that isn't from you, that you would cast to the wayside. We ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. I want to begin our time this morning by asking you a question. What is the most valuable thing in your life?

Or, to put it another way, what can you not live without? Perhaps for you, your first instinct might be your family, your relationship with your spouse.

[1 : 19] Perhaps it's your career, your house, your wealth. Perhaps it's the gifts that God has given you. Your body image. The number of likes you get on your Instagram or Facebook posts.

Your health. How do we measure the value of these things? This morning, we are going to see that the most valuable thing in all of existence is found in Jesus.

So much so, it is worth giving up everything else in your life in order to be found in him. Because without him, we have no way of being right with God and securing our eternal future.

And because with him, we can continue to learn about his everlasting love. Both in this life and in the life to come. So this morning, we're going to examine our passage today in three parts.

And the outline of these is in your bulletins. We're going to firstly look in verses 1 to 3 at remembering and guarding the gospel. Then, from verses 4 to 7, we're going to be thinking about rejecting our own efforts and losing our lives.

[2 : 29] And then finally, in verses 8 to 11, we're going to be thinking about gaining Christ and pursuing him. So if we can have our Bibles open, that would be brilliant. And we're going to look at the first of these three points now.

Looking at verses 1 to 3. Remembering and guarding the gospel. Let's read God's word together.

Beginning at verse 1. Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord.

It is no trouble to me to write the same things to you again. And it is a safeguard for you. Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh.

For it is we who are the circumcision. We who serve God by the Spirit. Who boast in Christ Jesus. And who put no confidence in the flesh.

In the book of Philippians, Paul is writing to the Christians in the church at Philippi. Now, the church at Philippi likely holds a very special place in Paul's heart.

[3 : 32] As it was the first church that he founded in Europe. You can read all about those events in Acts chapter 16. He knows the believers there personally.

So what words does Paul have for these Philippian brothers and sisters that he so dearly loves? Well, we see that in these first three verses, Paul is reminded the church of something of great value.

In verse 1, he says that he's going to cover old ground. He's going to repeat something that he has already mentioned before. So, to do that, it must be important then.

What's more, he also says that it will be a safeguard for them. Now, a safeguard is something that prevents someone from harm. So, whatever this thing of great value is, it will also keep them safe.

Prevent them from harm. It is something we must remember. We also see that whatever Paul is going to say is of value because it needs guarding. Notice the language at the beginning of verse 2. [4 : 41] Paul is asking the church to watch out for something. In fact, if we read this in Greek, the verse would read a little like this. Watch out for those dogs. Watch out for those evildoers.

Watch out for those mutilators of the flesh. Watch out for those dogs. He is issuing a clear warning against a group of people here. These people are threatening what Paul thinks is of so much value to the church.

And as we can clearly see, he is very angry. Now, we might cringe at Paul's anger here and the words that he uses, but what it shows us is that he really values something.

He wants to defend something valuable. Paul explains what this thing is in verse 3. And yes, it will help us understand why Paul has used such the insults that he has in verse 2.

In verse 3, we see what Paul wants the church to remember and guard. The gospel. Paul says we, the church, are set apart and chosen as God's people.

[5 : 48] That's why he uses the language, we are the circumcision. We are enabled by God to serve him by his spirit.

We also boast in Jesus Christ and put no confidence in the flesh. Well, why is this? Well, we'll see that over the course of this sermon.

But also, we've seen this over our sermon series over the last few weeks. We've seen that Jesus is the one who gives us a fresh start. The one who brings in the new covenant.

The one who gives us a sure and certain hope because of his death on the cross for our sins. He's the one who brings us great joy because he has secured our eternal future.

This is not about the flesh. Our own efforts to save. It is all about Jesus. All about Jesus and his amazing love. And that is why Paul is so angry here in verse 2.

[6 : 51] You see, in the context of Paul's writing, there were a group of people threatening these truths. The Judaizers. This is the group who Paul is referring to in verse 2.

For them, it was not all about Jesus and his work. There was more needed in order for us to be saved. Specifically, they thought that everyone needed to be circumcised.

They needed to follow Jewish law. So what they were doing here is that they were adding to the gospel. Making it about more than just Jesus and his work on the cross.

So through his choice insults here, Paul is seeking to make a point. The Jews call Gentiles dogs. Those who were outside of God's kingdom.

Paul now says that Judaizers are dogs outside of God's promises because they've added to the gospel. And in spite of their amazing law keeping, they are now evildoers because they've added to the gospel.

[8 : 02] And last but not least, the circumcision that they offer, it's now just mutilation because they have added to the gospel. Remembering that the gospel is about Jesus and his saving work is so, so important.

And our response to the gospel should be what we see in verse 1. To rejoice. That's why we have the command at the beginning of verse 1. Rejoice in the Lord.

We should also guard it carefully. False teaching, by adding to the gospel, sends people to eternal judgment in hell. And it also diminishes how people view Jesus.

It takes away from his glory and the wonder of the gospel. Do we hold as high a view of Jesus in the gospel as Paul does? Or are there other things of value in your life that are stealing the joy that should be found fully in Jesus?

Paul does not stop there. He has already shown us something of immeasurable value, the gospel. The only way to be right with God, saved from eternal judgment and brought into relationship with the God of the universe.

[9 : 10] Now he wants to continue this line of argument by showing why our efforts, the flesh, can give us no confidence. He does this through his own testimony in the next section of our text.

So let's look at verses 4 to 7 together. Reject your own efforts, lose your life. Paul writes, Though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence into flesh, I have more. Circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews.

In regards to the law, a Pharisee. As for zeal, persecuting the church. As for righteousness based on the law, faultless. But, whatever were gains to me, I now consider a loss for the sake of Christ.

Here we see Paul's testimony. His purpose here is not to show off. It is showing us why putting confidence in the flesh is not possible to save.

[10:25] Or, to put it another way, why putting our confidence in our own efforts is not enough to save us. In doing this, he is trying to show the futility of works.

To destroy the argument of the Judaizers. Works are nothing. They can't add to the gospel. Paul says, if being saved through the law and our own efforts were possible, he was in the best position to achieve it.

He has more reason than anyone else to be confident. He was circumcised on the eighth day, he tells us. So, ritualistically, Paul could do no better.

What's more, he was part of God's chosen people, Israel. He was from the tribe of Benjamin. The tribe where the first king of Israel came from, and the only other tribe that remained faithful to Judah during the split of the kingdom in the Old Testament.

He could speak Hebrew, not just Greek, like many of the Jews of his time. So, in terms of his heritage, Paul could do no better.

[11:42] What about his personal performance? Well, Paul tells us he was a Pharisee. One of the strictest followers of the Old Testament laws. He followed God's laws down to the smallest detail of everyday life.

What is more, we're told that he followed them with zeal. So much zeal, in fact, that he became a persecutor of the church. His righteousness, based on the law, in his eyes, was perfect.

In terms of his personal performance, he felt he could do no better. Through rituals, heritage, and performance, Paul could do no better.

This, then, gives us a better understanding of the word flesh. Because when we often hear this word, we usually think it describes people at their worst.

The sins that we commit through our fallen bodies. Now, whilst that is true, what we also see here is that flesh is also man at his very best.

[12:50] The very best man can do. But what is it worth? Is it enough to save us? Can we be confident that God will be satisfied with this record?

We find the answer in verse 7. Verse 7 is written in the past tense in the Greek.

The ESV puts it like this. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss. So here, we reach Damascus in Paul's testimony.

This is where he realizes that all of his previous efforts and achievements were in vain. Why? Because they could not secure his eternal future. Paul realized that his own efforts could not save him from eternal judgment in hell.

All of his achievements were worth nothing when he considered the most important thing. His eternal security. So that day, Paul gave up his life.

[14:00] He gave up his respectable position in Jewish society. His home. Everything. His life up until that point had been built on his performance. He made it to the very top of Jewish society.

And now he wants to lose it all for the sake of Christ. Paul finally understood the words of Jesus in Mark 8, 35 and 36. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it.

But whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Can we say the same this morning?

And have we asked this question seriously to ourselves? At the beginning, I asked what the most valuable thing in your life was. Or what you could live without or could not live without. We receive many good gifts from God in this life.

For some of us, it will be married life, family, our careers, our health. But these things, they end when our life ends. And more crucially, they're not going to save the biggest problem that we have.

[15:05] Our sin before God. None of these earthly gifts can save us from eternal judgment in hell. Therefore, when Paul weighed up everything in this world and his own efforts, he said they counted for nothing.

But, Paul tells us there is something that is worth giving up everything this world has to offer for. And his entire life for. For the sake of Christ.

Why would he do that? What does Christ offer? He goes on to explain that in the next few verses. And as we shall see, he thinks it was very much worth it.

So let's look at the third part of our text. Gain Christ and pursue him. Verse 8. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

For whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage 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.

[16:10] The righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ. Yes. To know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings.

Becoming like him in death. In his death. And so somehow attaining to the resurrection of the dead. Paul expresses at the end of verse 8 that he wants to gain Christ and be found in him.

He wants a righteousness that will make him confident before God. He has already realized that earthly heritage, rituals and performance cannot give him that. He also realizes the stakes.

Eternity is at stake. So he needs a righteousness that will make him right with God. We see two types of righteousness here in these verses.

A righteousness of my own that comes through the law. And one that comes from God. And on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ. First, let's look at these both quickly in turn.

[17:14] Paul says that he does not want a righteousness of his own that comes from the law. Why? It does not give him confidence. And for a number of good reasons. Firstly, keeping an unbroken record is hard.

And one slip up is enough to lose everything. It's a horrible burden to be living under such a record. Imagine for a moment that you've lived a perfect life up until the very last day on earth.

And then on that last day on earth you have one sinful thought. Not even an action. A sinful thought. That's it. Your entire record is gone.

What a horrible record. And what a horrible pressure that is to live under. The second problem that he has is that it's a righteousness of his own. In this way, Paul is the one who makes the judgment about whether he has kept it well.

He is the accused, but also the defense lawyer and the judge at the same time. In this position, he could never be certain that God would agree with his verdict.

[18:24] It is highly unlikely, if not impossible, or if not certain, that we would over-assess ourselves, or Paul would over-assess himself by overlooking some inner defects that he might have.

In the book *Gentle and Lowly*, the author writes that we are our best advocate or lawyer when we sin. We are really, really good at overlooking the wrongs that we do.

So we cannot be certain then that this righteousness satisfies God. And if righteousness, the aim of righteousness is to be made right with God, it is no wonder that Paul calls this righteousness garbage in verse 8.

It gives him no confidence. But praise God, we get to however. However, in Christ, we find a righteousness that does satisfy God.

One that we don't deserve, but out of his love for us, he chooses to offer freely. A righteousness that can give us confidence. Paul tells us that this righteousness comes from God himself.

[19:38] The judge, God himself, is the one from where this righteousness comes. So we know from the get-go that it's going to satisfy him. We can be confident from the start.

Secondly, it is offered on the basis of faith and through faith in Christ. It is free. It is free. It is free.

We only need to abandon our efforts and trust in Christ's righteousness on our behalf. However, as we all know, faith is only valuable if it's placed in something that is trustworthy.

But again, we can praise God. Christ is the object of our trust. And for that reason, we can rejoice. His record was perfect.

And God is satisfied with his sacrifice for us. The Son of God himself is the one who makes us acceptable to God. Paul gained Christ and his righteousness.

[20:38] If you're a non-believer today, the Bible says that you have a big problem in your life. And that problem is sin. No matter what efforts you put into being good, it is still a righteousness of your own standards that will not satisfy God.

Therefore, when this life ends, you will lose everything and spend eternity in judgment. God requires a perfect righteousness to satisfy him. And this is why the Christmas season is such good news.

In his love for us, God sent his own son, his perfect son, to live a perfect life and die for us. His sacrifice allows us to receive his perfect righteousness through faith.

This righteousness of God is free through faith and gives us eternal security. And what's more, it brings us into relationship with the God of this universe who loves us so, so much.

If you accept Christ's sacrifice for your sins, you will be found safe in Christ and safe for eternity.

This is what Christians refer to when they say the word gospel, the good news.

[21 : 49] It's amazing and it's why it's so worth reminding ourselves of and guarding. But many of you, we have already heard the gospel here and accepted it. For those of you who are already saved, what should your reactions to these truths be?

Well, Paul tells us that we are to pursue Christ. Now, if we have accepted Christ's righteousness through faith, we are now brought into relationship with him.

And our follow-up to that is to pursue this relationship. This is why in verse 10, Paul expresses that he wants to know Christ. Now, at first glance, this seems like a strange thing to say.

After all, it has been around 30 years since Paul came to know Christ on the way to Damascus. So what he's expressing here is he wants to know Christ more. It could be easy to say up until this point, Paul has simply done a cost-benefit analysis of accepting Jesus.

And it's decided that it is worth it because he wants to attain Christ's righteousness. Whilst this is true, Paul's primary motivation now, we can see, is to know Christ.

[23 : 04] His relationship with Christ is now his greatest treasure. He wants to know more of his love, grow closer to him.

And we can see this expressed in the progression that we see between verses 7 and verse 8. If verse 7 marked where Paul was when he came to know Christ, verse 8 shows us where he is now. And notice how things have progressed. Notice the language in verse 7. We had whatever were gains has now become everything in verse 8.

Loss in verse 7 has now become garbage. In verse 8, the language is stronger. But also notice how he speaks about Jesus has changed too.

What used to be a single word, Christ, has now been filled out over the years of experience with him. It is now the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus.

[24 : 13] My Lord. So we see that our relationship with Christ is not a static thing. It grows over time. As we grow in our knowledge of Christ, Paul's overwhelming desire is to know him more.

A healthy marriage on earth works in a similar way. We desire to learn more about our spouse. And over time, this naturally happens to us as we live through shared experiences over many years together.

Over that time, organically, the love that we have for all another grows more day by day. So how does this happen in our relationship with Christ?

Well, we can see some clues to that in verses 10 and 11. Here we see the characteristics of the Christian life. And we see that the ultimate aim is to become more like Christ and enjoy him forever. Christ is our treasure. So we want to become more like him. And the great thing is that God is pleased to help us with that aim. Paul expresses that he wants to know the power of his resurrection.

[25 : 24] Now what Paul means here is a couple of things. Firstly, as part of the gospel, Christ raised from the dead. We know that Christ rose from the dead.

And that secures our eternal future. When we die, we will be raised also. But Paul also has another use for it here. When Paul uses this power of the resurrection, this phrase, in other parts of his letters, we find out what this power is for.

So in Ephesians 3, 14 to 19, Paul explains that this power is used to make us more like him. And also in Colossians 1, verses 11 to 12, He explains that this power is there to give us endurance, faith, and lives that are characterized by thanksgiving to God.

But notice in these verses that we will also face suffering. I don't need to tell you that Paul's life is full of countless examples of suffering and giving up much for Christ's sake.

But notice Paul's reaction to it here. He thought that suffering was worth it. Losing everything was worth it.

[26 : 39] He counted the cost and saw that it was well worth it. He saw it as a means of growing his life for Christ. Walking alongside Christ through sufferings.

In a similar way to a married couple being brought closer together through shared suffering, living with the Lord through hard times also can bring us closer to him. And as we have seen already, the Lord equips us to face this.

And it gives us power to endure through his Holy Spirit. One commentator I came across in preparation for this morning's message described the Christian life as the gospel in motion. What this means is that we keep being reminded and confronted by the gospel and respond to it over and over again. Week after week after week.

We are shown Jesus, the love that Jesus has for us, his sacrifice for us on the cross. And over time, that changes us. It makes us more like him.

[27 : 45] We come to know him more. We come to love him more. The things of this earth reduce in value as we see the gospel over and over again.

Or as one of the old hymns once put it so well, Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in his wonderful face. And the things of the earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace. Finally, at the end of verse 11, we see Paul's goal. He wants to continue to pursue Christ and live with him forever. Christ is his everything.

His one goal. His only goal. Many of us this morning will be looking ahead to 2024 and making New Year's resolutions.

Well, in our passage this morning, Paul makes an eternity-long resolution. And it's a simple one. To know Christ. And unlike our earthly resolutions, that we may give up after a month, or, like me, maybe a few days, it can last because we are equipped, we are helped by the Spirit.

[29 : 05] What's more, the aim of the resolution is so much better. Because if we gain Christ, we gain eternal life. And enter into a relationship with the creator of the universe.

One who loves us immeasurably. I think you and I both can agree that that is much, much better than losing a few kilos after Christmas. What's more, it's a resolution that can last forever.

We can keep learning about Jesus for eternity. And there will always be something incredible to learn. We'll learn more of his love for us. It is a resolution that gives us eternal security, lasts forever, and has amazing value.

It is the only thing that matters and the only thing that can truly satisfy our souls. Paul cannot wait to spend eternity with Christ. Can we say the same this morning?

Let's remember and guard the gospel. Continually reject our own efforts and pursue Christ so that we can rejoice in the Lord. At the beginning I asked you what the most valuable thing was to you.

[30 : 15] I hope that perhaps the Spirit has convicted you and in your heart it was not Jesus that you reconsider and that it is now. We are seeing how he is the one who can offer a righteousness to us that can save us for eternity.

And that he loves us immeasurably. For those of you who are believers today, I hope this morning has stirred your heart again for Christ. That you would pursue him with all that you have.

That you would be able to rejoice in the Lord. I hope that we can all sing boldly in our response song in a moment. Knowing you, Jesus.

Knowing you. There is no greater thing. You're my all. You're the best. You're my joy. My righteousness. And I love you, Lord.

Let's pray together. Father God, we are so, so thankful for the gospel. That in your mercy and love, you made a way for us to be right with you.

[31 : 21] You sent your perfect son to be a sacrifice for us. A perfect righteousness so that we can be made right with you. We thank you that this is a free gift that we can accept through faith.

And so, Lord, we long that our desire is to know you and to strive after you more. We pray that you would help us in this endeavor. And that our hearts would be stirred to love you more each day by day.

We ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.