

A Shared Confidence

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[0:00] Let's pray as we get ready to hear from the Lord. Heavenly Father, we just heard about how your Holy Spirit is your empowering presence.

! Amen.

Imagine it's time to spring clean. How do you decide what to throw out? Now, some of us might say, maybe you don't need to throw out anything.

You never know if that old file or that old shirt might come in handy. But maybe your husband or your wife or your parents or your children have laid down the law.

So, how do you decide? A few years ago, a lady named Marie Kondo famously came up with a simple solution. She said, all you need to do is to pick up an object, one at a time, and ask this one question.

[1:17] Does it spark joy? That's it. Does it spark joy? If the answer is a clear yes, then, okay, keep it.

But if it doesn't, she says, thank it and let it go. That's all you need to do. Now, in some ways, that can apply not just to decluttering, but to life too, can't it?

We make decisions every day about what we hold on to. Not just in our cupboards, but in our hearts. Perhaps we hold on to certain goals or aspirations.

Or perhaps we hold on to certain beliefs or ideals. Perhaps we even hold on to certain ways of seeing ourselves. Because we think those things spark joy.

That's why a child keeps holding on to his new toy. That's why a fan keeps looking up to his favorite hero. That's why an addict keeps chasing the next high.

[2:29] But the problem is, toys can get spoiled. Heroes can disappoint. Highs eventually become lows.

And when those things are lost, so does our joy. Which is why Paul says right from the beginning today, rejoice in the Lord.

Not rejoice in things that can be taken away. Not rejoice in things that can disappoint. But rejoice in the one person who remains constant.

You see, all throughout this letter, Paul has been wanting to spark joy in the Philippian Christians. Did you notice that? So take 2 verse 17 to 18, for instance.

I look at what Paul says on the screen in simplified form. But I will rejoice even if I lose my life, pouring it out like a liquid offering to God, just like your faithful service is an offering to God.

[3:37] And I want all of you to share that joy. Yes, you should rejoice and I will share your joy. So Paul wants to spark in them a joy that transcends even death.

And that joy, he says, is found in the Lord. But now he also makes clear what this joy does for us.

Look at the end of verse 1. Did you notice how he describes this joy? It's a safeguard. In other words, it's something that keeps you safe.

It's something that keeps you anchored when the winds are howling and there are strong waves all around. It's something that protects you, preserves you, shelters you.

And yet it is also something we often lose sight of. That's why Paul says he has no hesitation to keep talking about rejoicing in the Lord again and again.

[4 : 50] Because once we lose sight of the joy that is found in Christ, we start drifting into dangerous waters. We move into unsafe spaces.

But how can we stay anchored in the joy of the Lord? How can we stay safe? And Paul says, it's simple really.

It all boils down to where you place your confidence. And there are only really two possibilities. You can either place your confidence in the flesh or your confidence in Christ.

And if you want to stay safe, Paul says, choose the latter, not the former. So let's unpack that together. Firstly, don't place your confidence in the flesh.

Now, pause for a moment. And I want you to think about the situation Paul is in. And think about the situation the Philippians are in.

[6 : 03] Do you remember what chapter 1 has revealed to us? Paul is writing this letter from prison. 1 verse 13.

And the Philippian Christians are facing real opposition for their faith. 1 verse 28. Now, given that situation, let me ask you this.

What would you think is most likely to rob them of their joy? What would you expect Paul to warn them about?

Surely it would be persecution. Surely it would be imprisonment. Surely it would be pressure from the Romans. And if I wanted to help the Philippians to safeguard their joy, I might say, watch out for those black Marias.

Watch out for the special brunch. Watch out for the government. But Paul doesn't seem to think those external threats can take their joy away from the Lord.

[7 : 13] Instead, he homes in on something else altogether. Verse 2. Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh.

Now, wow, that is very strong language. In fact, although our English translations don't show it so that it sounds smooth, in the original Greek, he says, watch out three times.

So clearly, Paul thinks this particular group of people are dangerous. They're not safe to be around. They're the ones who can rob you of your joy.

But, who are they? Well, these were not the Roman soldiers. They were not the special brunch.

Rather, these were people, as the commentator Alec Mertier puts it, who put a plus sign after Christ in their teaching about salvation.

[8 : 21] They were Jews, what we today might call Judaizers. And basically, they love to say to new Christian converts who didn't come from a Jewish background, ah, it's wonderful you accepted Jesus.

Hallelujah. Hey, but look, you need to do something extra. if you really want to be counted as God's people, you need to become Jewish.

Oh? Paul didn't tell you that? Ayah, that's because he didn't give you the whole story, ma. But, what you really need is to be circumcised.

Then, God will really shine his face on you and smile at you. But, until then, you can't be sure he is rejoicing in you.

In other words, their real confidence was in the flesh, literally, in circumcision, which marked their Jewish identity.

[9 : 34] But, Paul denounces such people in the strongest possible terms. Look out for these dogs, he says. Now, in those days, calling someone a dog is actually a pretty common way the Jews would insult the non-Jews.

After all, they reason, are Jews not the ones who get a seat at the top table in God's kingdom? And, it's not everyone else the ones on the outside left to forage for any leftover scraps like stray dogs.

But, Paul now turns the tables and says, these Judaizers are the dogs. They're the unclean ones, the outsiders, the cast away from God's kingdom.

circumcision, for they are evildoers. Because, when they require circumcision, they are telling people a lie.

They are telling people, God needs something from us, he doesn't actually need. You see, in the Old Testament, circumcision was meant to be a sign that God had made a promise to Abraham.

[10 : 59] A promise that one day, a descendant of Abraham would emerge, whom God would use to rescue and cleanse a people for himself.

In other words, it was always meant to point forward. And now that this promised descendant, Jesus, has come, circumcision was no longer needed.

The sign has done its job. The promise has been fulfilled. So, if you are making circumcision the key requirement, while leaving Jesus on the sidelines, you are badly missing the point.

For all you are doing in the end is mutilating the flesh. You are just cutting away a piece of the body for no good reason at all. And so Paul says, don't be like them.

Don't place your confidence in the flesh. After all, that's what a Christian is, is it not? For look at the end of verse 3.

[12 : 16] A Christian is someone who puts no confidence in the flesh. And at this point, you might be thinking, well, sure, pastor, that's not a problem because no one is asking me today to be circumcised anyway, and even if they did, I'll definitely turn them down.

So, what's the issue here? But when Paul uses that word flesh, he's not merely thinking about circumcision.

He's not even merely thinking about physical bodies. No, by flesh here, he means anything we rely on other than Christ to justify ourselves, to feel acceptable, secure, or valuable.

It's anything we point to in addition to Christ to prove we deserve a seat at the table. That could be certain moral rules.

So, we might say, hey, I'm okay because, you know what, I'm all about kindness. I'm all about tolerance. Well, surely that counts for something.

[13 : 40] Or it could be certain successful endeavors. So, we might say, hey, I'm okay because, you know what, I've built my company through sheer hard work and honesty.

I've raised my family right. I've looked after my aging grandma well. Or it could be certain identity markers. So, we might say, hey, I'm okay because, you know what, I have a reputable family name, I go to the right church, I have a K on my IC.

And these things are not bad in themselves. But the moment they become the basis of our confidence, they fall under the category of flesh.

And Paul says, don't do that. It's a dead end. And he knows what he's talking about. after all, Paul isn't speaking as a bystander, he is speaking as a recovering flesh truster.

And if we are talking about comparing track records, Paul will beat us hands down. As he puts it in verse four, if anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more.

[15:06] So, for example, do you want to talk about pedigree? Well, Paul says, verse five, I was circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin.

So, from day one, I had the right background. I was born into the faith, raised in the right circles, from a background people trust. In fact, I am not just an Israelite, I am from the Benjamin tribe.

In other words, I come from one of the only two tribes that remain faithful to the line of King David, Israel's greatest king.

So, I am pure. In fact, I am a Hebrew of Hebrews. I am not like some banana who doesn't know the language or the culture or the history of my people.

I am the real deal. Or, if you prefer to talk about performance instead of pedigree, no problem.

[16:10] Because verses 5 and 6, look at what I've done. I have Olympic levels of spiritual discipline. As to the law, a Pharisee.

And no one will ever accuse me of being lukewarm, Poe says. Hey, I was so committed to God, I was willing to travel hundreds of mouths to take out anyone I thought was his enemy.

As to you, a persecutor of the church. And I was the ultimate good guy. Just bring out the religious checklist of the day and you will see I tick every single box.

You won't find me in any ancient equivalent of the Epstein files. As to righteousness under the law, blameless. If anyone deserved a seat at the head of the table, it was Paul.

And once upon a time, these were all things he boasted In fact, it is what all humans naturally boast in.

[17:21] for yes, we might not boast about how we are circumcised or am an Israelite, but it's so easy to appeal to our own version of pedigree and performance, isn't it?

We might say, you know what? I come from a family with three generations of Christians. I come from a tribe with a rich Christian legacy.

Books have even been written about it. My father and my grandfather are respected members of the Christian community. We might say, you know what?

I've been part of the best church in Malaysia, or Australia, or Singapore, or the UK, however you define best.

I've sat under good preaching. In fact, the preachers I've sat under are names you might recognize. I've been the president of the OCF or the FES group at university.

[18:23] I've gone to the right Christian conferences. I've got every reason to be confident before God and others. Or maybe we say, hey, I'm from Sarawak.

not Malaya. So I am not like all those ignorant, racist, hateful people on the other side of the South China Sea. God will definitely prefer me over them.

And Paul says, watch out that you are not putting your confidence in these things. Because even as Christians, our hearts can still drift.

We can still quietly shift our trust away from Christ. And that is dangerous because those things were never meant to hold us secure.

But how do we know if we are? Well, here is one possible way. Try this. imagine you are in church in Philippi during the first century and you are looking at someone else during the service and you know you both love the same Lord and you are gathered round the same cross.

[19 : 53] But as you look at that person, you are whispering in your heart, I know that you are a believer, but I wonder if you have actually been circumcised.

I have. Now translate that over to the 21st century here in KEC. And once again, you are in church, you are looking at another person, and this time, you are whispering in your heart, I know that you are a believer, but I wonder, are you really serving?

Are you in a home group? Are you regular in your quiet times? Well, I am. That's when you know.

You see, in the end, do you recognize what Paul is actually doing in Philippians 3? He isn't simply contrasting our sin with Christ's righteousness.

Rather, he is contrasting our accomplishments with the righteousness of Christ. And he is saying, until we are willing to let go of even our accomplishments, to declutter our hearts of all those trophies, and hold on to Christ alone, we won't experience the full spark of joy the gospel can give us.

[21 : 34] Or to adapt what another pastor once said, if we want to give Jesus our sin and yet still place confidence in ourselves, then we won't really experience the depths of joy that is possible with Christ.

Because either we will think our pedigree or performance are great and will be led to pride, or we think that our pedigree or performance are useless and will be led to despair.

And that danger remains whether we've just become Christians or we have been Christians for decades. So don't place your confidence in the flesh.

Stop using your efforts as a verdict on your status before God. Instead, verse 3, remember who we are.

We are people who boast in Jesus Christ. So delight in the one who delighted to rescue you from your sin. Delight in the one who delighted to make you a child of God.

[22 : 48] Delight in the one who delighted to give you the spirit to open your eyes, to warm your hearts so that you might serve and worship him.

And when your confidence is no longer in the flesh, paradoxically, you are actually free to work hard without trying to prove yourself, to fail without being crushed, and to obey God not out of fear, but out of joy.

Isn't that wonderful? And that is all the reason we need to place our confidence in Christ instead.

That's the second encouragement Paul wants to give us today. Place your confidence in Christ. You see, who alone can safeguard our joy, should there be opposition or persecution or any other kinds of trials and tribulations?

Who alone can be our anchor when storms arrive and things begin to break up? The answer is Christ alone.

[24 : 07] Do you believe that? Paul certainly does. That's why in verse 7, he says, but whatever were gains for me, I now consider lost for the sake of Christ.

You see, it's like Paul is taking a look at his life and doing a complete re-audit of it. And he's realized that he's got to shift around what goes into the credit column and what goes into the debit.

So he says, exam results, first class degree, I used to think that was credit, but nope, it's lost.

Move it over. Service in church? Service to the wider community? Nope, not credit either, over it goes into the lost column.

What about my hours spent in Bible study preparation? Or my many acts of kindness? Even my cultural heritage? It loss, Paul says.

[25 : 17] They are to be regarded as liabilities, not assets. You see, let me show you how radical God's gospel really is.

It doesn't just take away our shame, though it does. It takes away our boasting! too. It doesn't just deal with our failures, it loosens our grip on our achievements.

Because the gospel is Jesus plus nothing. It is pure Jesus all the way down. And the reason it is Jesus all the way down is because God knows it is Jesus who sparks the most joy.

For did you notice that phrase in verse 8? The surpassing worth of knowing Christ? So Paul is telling us when all is said and done there is nothing compared to knowing Christ.

Now notice Paul doesn't deny that all his previous accomplishments once counted as gain. They really did matter to him. They really did give him confidence.

[26 : 46] But when Christ entered the picture those things became like garbage to him. And actually the NIV is just being polite. The word garbage there is really the word manure,!

Dung! Tahi! And does anyone in their right mind hold onto dung? No, they flush it away as soon as they can.

And that's how Paul regards all his past achievements. He flushes them away. Because now that he has Christ, he has the greatest treasure of all.

people people people who are people are willing to recalculate what is truly valuable and to count even good things as loss for him.

Why should our confidence be in Christ alone? Paul says it's really because Jesus offers us three things above all.

[27 : 50] Three things only he can offer and they are righteousness, resurrection, and relationship. So first off, righteousness.

Look at verse 9. Paul says, when I gain Christ, when I'm found in him, I discover I don't have a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ.

Now let me try to illustrate what that's like. When I was in Bible college, I had a lecturer who was known as a very strict marker. And when the time came to submit an assignment, I was honestly a little nervous.

So I worked hard, I checked and rechecked my work, I made sure the arguments were clear, the references were right, and the punctuation was correct. Eventually, I submitted it.

A few weeks later, I got the assignment back. And you know how essays usually have a cover sheet, you know, where you have to write your student number, subject code, that kind of thing.

[29 : 01] One of the things we had to write on that cover sheet was the lecturer's name. And right there, in red pen, was a big circle around his surname.

I had misspelled it. red circle was all I could see.

And that is a bit like what Paul is getting at when he talks about a righteousness of my own. We can work hard, we can try our best, we can be sincere and serious and disciplined.

But when our righteousness is built on what we do, something will eventually go wrong. And it only takes one failure, sometimes even something basic, to show that it could never stand.

And Paul's point is not that God is nitpicky, is that God's standard is perfect righteousness, and none of us can produce that on our own.

[30 : 20] But here is the good news. Christ offers us something infinitely better than anything we could produce ourselves, a righteousness that comes from God himself.

It is his own perfect, unshakable righteousness given to us by grace. And it is something we receive through faith in Christ.

In other words, we don't receive this righteousness by doing something, but by relying on someone. And here is the amazing thing.

If it is Christ we are relying on, then that anxiety that what we can offer, isn't good enough, begins to disappear.

Because you can be sure that if it's Christ's righteousness that is being presented to God, the red pen won't be coming out. For his work has no blemish.

[31 : 29] He won't be misspelling anyone's name. And Christ is submitting that perfect work on your behalf. So you'll be safe.

That is why Christ is of surpassing worth. But Christ doesn't just offer us righteousness. Paul says second of all, he offers us resurrection.

Look at verses 10 and 11. Paul says he wants to know Christ and specifically to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so somehow attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

Now my friends, let me take you to another part of the Bible for a moment. I want to take you to Ezekiel 37. In that chapter, the prophet Ezekiel stands in a valley and it is filled with dry, dead human bones.

Put yourself in his shoes. This is no abstract philosophical encounter with death. How can it be when you can see skulls and skeletons everywhere?

[33 : 00] And some of you, having suffered bereavements recently, can identify with Ezekiel here, I'm sure. And as he stands there, dumbstruck, God asks him, can these bones live?

I mean, what kind of question is that? Imagine you're at a funeral and someone stands by the casket and asks the grieving family that.

Super insensitive, right? But you know what? God subsequently tells Ezekiel to say to the bones, Ezekiel's I will make breath enter you.

I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you. I will open your graves and bring you out from them. I will put my spirit in you.

And to Ezekiel's astonishment, that is exactly what happens. And that, my friends, is the power of resurrection.

[34 : 20] It's the power to make dead bones live. And Paul says, I know that is what is going to happen to me in the future, even when I'm just a bag of bones, because Christ is risen.

And that is why I can consider everything else as loss. and Christ as full of surpassing worth, because only he can make dead bones live.

But Paul isn't just saying that in Christ he has this hope of resurrection from the dead. He is also saying in Christ he can know resurrection power now.

The same power that raised Jesus from the dead now belongs to those who belong to him. and that same power is what enables us slowly but surely to become the new creation God has made us to be.

Let me ask you, do you long to be a better person? A kinder person? A more patient person? A self-controlled person?

[35 : 38] in Christ you can. That's what Paul is saying here. He knows that power is available now and he expresses his longing for it.

But as the commentator Alec Mertier once again so nicely puts it, Christ-likeness must lead to Calvary. we experience resurrection power only when we are willing to endure the same pain Christ did.

We participate in his sufferings. and yet precisely because we know that as we partner with Christ in the pain that we will receive the price of resurrection that's why we can endure whatever comes.

That's how Paul and the Philippians could do it. And then finally Christ is of surpassing worth because of relationship.

Did you notice what Paul says at the beginning of verse 10? I want to know Christ. Wait a minute. Doesn't he already know Christ?

[37 : 03] After all, does he not call Christ Jesus my Lord in verse 8? But here's the thing. Knowing Christ and pursuing Christ more and more is a journey that never ends.

You see, sometimes we reduce Christianity to this question. What's the minimum I need to know to be saved? Tell me and then let me be done with it. But being a Christian is way more than that.

To be a Christian is about one thing, to know and enjoy a real living person who has made himself known to us as both God and man.

And because Jesus is God, and God is infinite, that means there will never be a point where we say, I know all there is to know about God.

And get this, if knowing Christ is really another way of saying, rejoice in the Lord, that means there will be no end to our rejoicing in the Lord.

[38 : 24] We will never get over just how awesome and amazing Jesus is. The joy we will experience will be endless. is that not surpassing worth?

Now, if you are not a Christian here this morning, these are all the reasons why you should place your confidence in Christ. There is no one else like him.

And if you are a Christian this morning, these are all the reasons why you should count everything else as loss and pursue Christ with all your heart.

Nothing else compares. Two weeks ago, I was in Melbourne and I had the privilege of getting to know Pastor John a little.

He's going to be our speaker at the KVBC NextGen Conference this year. Now, when I was pondering whether to invite him to speak at our conference, I decided to listen to a couple of his sermons online.

[39 : 35] And in one of his sermons, he started with this thought experiment and it is so brilliant, it is what I'm going to finish with. He says, consider your life in totality.

Think about every part of it. Your parents, family, children, work, friendships, church, hobbies, everything.

Now, imagine bad stuff happening and these things slowly stripping away one by one. So, for example, imagine you lost your job.

Then, imagine yourself saying, at least I have this, whatever this might be. So, if you lose your job, you might say, well, at least I have a loving spouse.

Now, imagine your marriage is in trouble. So, you say, at least I have my children. But, perhaps your children have gone wayward.

[41:01] So, you say, at least I have my friends. But, your friends begin to distance themselves from you one by one. And, so, you say, at least I have my health.

But, then, you fall sick. And, on it goes. And, I want you to imagine everything slowly being stripped away one by one.

And, when you get to the end and there is nothing left, what can you say? At least I still have what?

what? What will that thing be? For as you age, and when death approaches, that is what will happen to varying degrees.

Won't it? Things will begin to be stripped from you. but, what if, at the end, you can say, at least I still have Jesus.

[42:28] I still have that one person who loves me, cares for me, has rescued me, justified me, redeemed me, will never leave me, nor forsake me, and will ensure that in God's new creation, there is a brand new me, isn't that worth everything?

So, place your confidence in Christ, not in the flesh. Say, I want to know Christ, no matter what, then no matter your loss, all will be gained.

let's pray. Father, as we ponder those words of Philippians 3 now, I pray that the radical nature of what Paul has to say has really hit home for us.

And perhaps, Father, we recognize that we are clinging and holding on to things, things that we are so sure will spark real joy in us. but perhaps, Lord, we are holding on to those things at the cost of something even greater.

And if that is true, Lord, please show it to us now. Please help us to begin to let go of that thing, whatever it might be, to give it to you, and to receive from you again, not just grace, not just your kindness, but actually, ultimately, Christ himself, the one who is of all surpassing worth.

[44:09] Please help us to wrestle with this truth over the coming days, and by your spirit, convict us. We pray all this in the name of Christ. Amen.