

NOTHING BUT THE BLOOD OF JESUS

PHILIPPIANS 3:1-11

IN ORDER TO REALIZE GODLY HUMILITY IN OUR LIVES, WE MUST FIRST COME TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT IT IS NOTHING BUT THE BLOOD OF JESUS THAT ALLOWS US TO BE IN A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, THAT GIVES MEANING TO OUR LIVES, AND EMPOWERS US TO BE ALL THAT GOD CREATED US TO BE.

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NOTHING BUT THE BLOOD OF JESUS

PHILIPPIANS 3:1-11

If you have been following the text in Philippians, you will have noticed that Paul talks about joy and rejoicing in some pretty strange contexts. This morning Paul is going to start off this section again talking about joy.

Let's also keep in mind that Paul has talked a lot about humility. It takes humility to keep a church together and it takes standing together to fight off the attacks of Satan and this world.

I want you to think about the next statement I am going to make. "Righteous people are dangerous to the unity and health of the church." That sounds funny, doesn't it? But think about it for a moment. The most righteous people of Jesus' day were the ones who constantly tried to kill Him. It was righteous men who started, funded, and participated in the Crusades. It has been righteous people who burned and killed people over the centuries over theological issues. And we can see it in modern day Islam. Crazy, misguided righteous people are blowing up innocent people all over the world.

The problem with righteous people is that they always compare themselves to other people. And further, they usually compare themselves with people obviously lower than they are. Rarely do they compare themselves with someone more righteous.

Let me give you an example. One Thanksgiving Eve, I was out with one of my friends. We were walking down the street, and a homeless guy stopped us and asked us for a couple of dollars for dinner.

My friend surprised me. He took out a \$10 bill. He asked the man, "If I give you this money, will you buy some beer with it?"

The homeless guy replied, "No sir. I stopped drinking years ago."

My friend continued, "Will you use it to gamble instead of buying food?"

"No," the guy said, "I don't gamble. I need every penny I can get to stay alive."

"How about golf?" my friend asked, "You won't go and spend the money on golf will you?"

"Are you nuts!" the guy said, "I haven't played golf in over 20 years."

My friend pressed on; "You won't go find a prostitute with this money, will you?"

"Do you think I'm crazy?" said the homeless guy, "What kind of disease do you think I'd get for a lousy \$10?"

Now what my friend did stunned me. He gave the guy the \$10 and then invited him home for dinner. I wasn't the only one shocked. The homeless guy said, "That's very generous sir, but won't your wife be furious with you for doing that? I know I'm dirty, and I probably smell pretty disgusting."

My friend said, "That's perfectly okay. I just want her to see what a man looks like who's given up drinking gambling, golf and sex."

Isn't that the way righteous people are? They are always comparing themselves to someone who is less righteous.

Since Paul loves the Philippian church so much, he won't let them get away with any of that kind of thinking. And because God loves us, and inspired the Bible, He will not let us off the hook either. If there is any doctrine that is clear in the Bible, it is this one. All the grace and mercy we receive, in fact everything in life we receive, is because of Jesus. From beginning to end, salvation comes through nothing but the blood of Jesus. In other words, **IN ORDER TO REALIZE GODLY HUMILITY IN OUR LIVES, WE MUST FIRST COME TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT IT IS NOTHING BUT THE BLOOD OF JESUS THAT ALLOWS US TO BE IN A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, THAT GIVES MEANING TO OUR LIVES, AND EMPOWERS US TO BE ALL THAT GOD CREATED US TO**

BE.

I. CAN RESTORE OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (VS 1-7)

Only Through The Blood Of Jesus Can We Enjoy A Right Relationship With God.

Keep this in mind as we study through the book of Philippians. Paul commands them to be unified. They are to stand strong against the enemies from outside the church and they are to guard themselves against selfish pride that can tear the church apart from within. The only way they can accomplish these goals is to be humble. If we could just come to accept the truth about the work of Jesus on the cross, then we could truly become humble. In verses 1-7 the apostle makes it crystal clear that nothing but the blood of Jesus can restore our relationship with God. **ONLY THROUGH THE BLOOD OF JESUS CAN WE ENJOY A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.** I know that's basic Christian doctrine and probably we all agree with that, but my feeling is that we don't really believe it. Let me explain.

A. THE SOURCE OF JOY (1)

Remember last week we said that Epaphroditus risked everything to serve Jesus, Paul, and the Philippians. Here in verse 1 Paul is saying that betting it all on Christ is the only true source of joy. I think it's probably better to translate the word "finally" like the New Living Translation does as, "Whatever happens." In other words, this is not Paul starting to bring the letter to a close; it's more like him saying something like, "In the end," or "When all is said and done, rejoice in the Lord." Joy is to be found in Jesus and Jesus alone. Here is where we make our first mistake. We think that circumstances or people can bring us joy. Let's put this in the context of last week's message. I came to the conclusion in my own personal life, that I am a loser when it comes to putting everything on the line for Jesus. The temptation for me would be to become more religious. But that would only bring more unhappiness. Joy can only be found in a solid relationship with Jesus. The Philippians must have been a lot like me because it seems that Paul had to remind them of this several times. It appears that he wrote them other letters, but this is the only one that survived and is included in our Bibles. Paul is saying, "Look, I never get tired of telling you this. You are saved by grace through faith. You live only by grace through faith. You can only find joy, peace, and fulfillment by grace through faith and you can only be humble, stand strong, and maintain unity by grace through faith."

The only way we can stay on course as believers is to remember that it is nothing but the blood of Jesus that saves us and empowers us.

B. WATCH OUT FOR RIGHTEOUS PEOPLE (2)

In verse 2 Paul warns the Philippians to watch out for righteous people. Even though our English translations are accurate, we tend to miss the urgency of Paul's warning here. I don't know how many of you are old enough to remember the television show, "Lost in Space," but in the show, the young boy had a robot that was like a friend. Whenever the robot sensed something wrong, he would go crazy, flail his arms around spasmodically, his eyes and head would light up, and he would circle back and forth yelling, "Danger Will Robinson! Danger!" Paul is a little excited by this.

The first way he demonstrates the urgency of this is by giving some short, staccato commands. In Greek it reads something like, "Watch out for the dogs! Watch out for the evil doers! Watch out for the mutilators!"

The second way he demonstrates how crazy he is about this is that he uses some graphic and twisted language. And the third way is that he resorts to some very vulgar language.

Let's continue on with verse 2. I think we forget what the early church was like. Through the centuries, the Christian church has fostered and perpetrated a great deal of anti-Semitism. We forget that the pressing question of the early church was whether Gentiles had to first become Jews since Jesus was the Jewish Messiah and Israel was God's chosen people. Jews were Jews in many different ways just as today. One could be Jewish religiously, culturally, socially, nationally, or politically. In the time of Jesus, these were all intertwined for serious Jews. That's why Jews who had come to follow Jesus demanded that Gentiles first convert to Judaism and then to Christianity.

If you were to go back and study Acts 15, the Jerusalem Council, composed of all Jewish believers, decided that since we are all only saved by faith in Jesus, there should not be any extra burdensome requirements placed on Gentiles who wanted to believe in Jesus. So the council told the Gentiles to stay away from anything that smacked of idolatry like eating meat offered to idols or eating strangulated meat with the blood still in it, and they were to avoid sexual immorality. That was the official decision of the council.

Yet, there were Jewish Christians who refused to let it go. They followed the Apostle Paul around and tried to force new converts into following the Jewish religious laws. Paul takes umbrage with them.

Look at verse 2. First of all, he calls them dogs. Religious Jews had nothing to do with non-Jews. They referred to Gentiles as dogs. Dogs were not cute little house pets like in the United States . In the ancient world, dogs were much like dogs in third world countries. They were nasty, dirty, and disease ridden. They were scavengers and often bit people. They hung around in packs looking for something to attack and eat. Paul turns it all around and calls these religious Judaizers dogs themselves. He says, watch out for them.

Next he says, "Watch out for the evil workers." The Pharisees did a lot of religious things. They made us look pathetic. They gave a tenth of all their money to church, they prayed several times a day, they kept strict diets so as not to pollute themselves, and they avoided contact with anything that could compromise their keeping of the religious rules. They not only read their bibles; they had memorized most of it. They took pride in their good works. Paul said that these people who tried to make Gentiles live by these same standards were doing evil works, not good works.

And one of those religious works was circumcision. The physical mark of God's covenant with Israel was circumcision. These Judaizers were saying that Gentiles who converted to Christianity had to be circumcised as well. Just like the other two descriptions Paul has twisted the idea and thrown it back on them. He does the same thing here. He has called them dogs and evil workers. Now he calls them mutilators. Paul takes the word for circumcision, which is *peritome* and changes it to *katatome*, which means mutilation. Paul is saying, "Watch out for those guys, they say they're here to circumcise you, but actually they're here to amputate your genitals and then cut them up into pieces. As you read this, make it as vulgar and offensive as you can. Paul says that anyone who attempts to distort the gospel message by adding anything to it is a dog, a worker of evil, and a mutilator.

C. TRUE CHRISTIANITY (3-7)

The point is this. We are saved by the blood of Jesus, plus or minus nothing. Verses 3-7 describe true Christianity. Before we get into this section, let me try and make this applicable to our time. There are plenty of righteous people in churches today. They are the people who do a lot of church work. They may be the pastors of churches. They may be board members, worship team people, Sunday School people, and they may give a lot of time and money to the church. They read their bibles religiously and attend prayer meetings and every function the church has. They really look holy from the outside. But the problem is that they have come to think they are good. Oh, they may say that they're no good, but that's oftentimes simply a display of false modesty.

We must keep this in mind. No amount of religious works can make me better than anyone else.

1. FAITH IN JESUS (3)

In verse 3 Paul describes what it means to be an authentic Christian. He describes true believers as God's covenant people referring to us as the circumcised. In other words, we all become members of God's covenant family by placing our faith in Christ alone. True Christianity is different from all other religions in this. In other religions, we are required to earn God's acceptance. We must do things to be approved by God. That's why we have these poor misguided suicide bombers. They somehow think God will accept them because of the acts of self-sacrifice. It doesn't matter which religion you look at; the direction is always the same. It is humans trying to earn acceptance by God.

Christianity is exactly the opposite. The direction goes from God down to humans. *"For God so loved the world He gave His one and only Son." "Jesus took on human flesh and lived among us."* The start of the problem for unbelievers is that for the most part, they think they are good. They are just as self-righteous as religious people. They think somehow they are good people and at least they are better than murderers, prostitutes, drug addicts, and tyrants. But the bible is clear on this point. None of us are good. We are all evil. If we were really honest with ourselves, and willing to compare ourselves with some of the most noble humans in history, we have to come to the conclusion that we really are no good at all. But the answer is not to try and become good enough to earn heaven.

In his letter to the Romans Paul said that because God made a way to fix the problem by the blood of Jesus Christ, we get into a right relationship with God by confessing Jesus as Lord and believing that He rose from the dead. In other words, God reached out to fix the broken relationship between Him and us. All we can do is receive His hand and say, "Thank You."

2. THE SEDUCTION OF RELIGION (4-6)

Keep this in mind as we go along. We can never be in a right relationship with God by being good or religious. But there is always the danger of the seduction of religion as described in verses 4-6. The seductive power appeals to our pride. We want to earn things. We want to be better than others. We want to think because we are so good, we deserve salvation. We get confused about these things.

Since I covered Paul's background information earlier, I'll skim it here. But what I want us to think about is this. There are a lot of people who do good things or at least they think they do a lot of good things. But let's compare anything we have done to what Paul accomplished before meeting Jesus. Paul came from a Jewish family. His father and mother were both Jewish. And what's even more important was that he came from the tribe of Benjamin. The tribe of Benjamin was noted for producing warriors. The tribe of Benjamin produced the first king of Israel whom Paul was probably named after before he changed his name. Benjamin sided with Judah during the civil war. Because God preserved these two tribes even in captivity, they were probably the only two tribes that were able to prove their Jewish genealogy. The capital city of Jerusalem was located within the tribal boundaries of Benjamin. Paul certainly was a Hebrew of Hebrews. Of course, Paul had no control of that. He happened to be born into this influential family. But Paul worked to add to that proud heritage. He attended perhaps the most prestigious Hebrew academy of the day. He was educated under the Rabbi Gamaliel. He became a member of the very exclusive group of religious men known as Pharisees. They approached the Hebrew religious law with great enthusiasm. They were looked up to and highly revered. They were holy men. Here Paul says that he was so careful as to keeping religious law, that he was faultless. He kept the rules scrupulously. And he was so on fire for the Lord, that he persecuted these Christians who were trying to pollute his religion.

Think about this. Paul read his bible constantly. He memorized the bible and prayed throughout the day. He went to church every day. He didn't smoke or drink or gamble or do anything questionable. He gave a lot of his money to the church and to the poor. He taught bible classes. He went out evangelizing wayward Jews and lost Gentiles. He even went after the Christian church that was perverting Judaism. This guy would put us to shame. He was religious.

3. NO PEACE OR JOY IN RELIGION (7)

If anyone appeared to be good, it would have been Paul. But one day he met the risen Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus and Paul's life was changed forever. In that short encounter with Jesus, Paul realized that he could never be good enough to stand in God's presence. In verse 7 he makes an accounting operation. In one column he puts all his good works, all the religious things he had ever done. In the other column he put only Jesus Christ. He at once realized that everything in his personal works column could never get him close to God's holiness. So all the years he spent in being religious, he wrote off as a loss. The only thing on his ledger that could put him in a right

relationship with God was the blood of Jesus Christ.

One of the reasons peace and joy often allude us is that we don't want to let go of our righteousness. Somehow we want to believe all our good deeds and obedience somehow mean something and entitle us to something. If in any way we are judgmental of others, then we have not fully embraced the fact that it is only by faith in Jesus that we can possibly be saved, plus or minus nothing. The power of Paul's argument is that he had it all and did it all. He was about as religious as anyone could be, yet he only found peace when he finally found Jesus. **ONLY THROUGH THE BLOOD OF JESUS CAN WE ENJOY A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.** This is important because if somehow we think our salvation is dependent on our good works, we will never find peace and joy, because in reality, we are always sinning. I don't know about you, but I am counting only on the blood of Jesus to be in a right relationship with God. I cannot do it by being good.

II. CAN PUT LIFE INTO PROPER PERSPECTIVE (VS 8-9)

Only Through The Blood Of Jesus Can We Understand What Is Truly Valuable

Often we can't find peace and joy because we have our priorities all messed up. We think that worldly accomplishments or worldly recognition can make us happy. However, peace and joy never seem to rest on us because we're too busy trying to hang on to what we have or too busy trying to get more. But if we are to enjoy the Christian life, we must come to a place in our lives where we admit that there is nothing but the blood of Jesus that can put life into proper perspective as described in verses 8-9. In other words, **ONLY THROUGH THE BLOOD OF JESUS CAN WE UNDERSTAND WHAT IS TRULY VALUABLE.**

A. FINDING WHAT'S VALUABLE (8)

In verse 8 Paul talks about finding what's truly valuable. Paul not only had his religious bases covered, he was a Roman citizen. Paul was rich, famous, and on the fast track to the top of Hebrew culture. He was on track to be the next famous Rabbi and leader of the Jews. He was well to do culturally as well. He traveled in all the right circles. There was no stopping him. Last week we talked about betting it all on Jesus. Paul was so overwhelmed by the love and power of Jesus, he gave it all away to become a Christian. And believe me. He gave it all away. After that day he gave his life to Jesus,

Jesus sent him on all sorts of dangerous missions. Paul was beaten, jailed, shipwrecked, stoned, and left for dead. In fact, as he penned this letter, he was under arrest. In the end, Paul was crucified. Again, in accounting terms, Paul says, compared to knowing Jesus as his Messiah and Lord, there could be nothing in this world that could match that. He felt so loved and so freed by Jesus, he no longer needed the things of this world to make him happy. He had been reaching up for God all his life without success, but He only got what he was really hungry for when God reached down and took hold of him. Paul felt that there was nothing in this world that could satisfy him like Jesus. No money, no power, no fame ... nothing can satisfy us like Jesus.

B. FINDING PEACE AND SUCCESS (9)

In verse 9 Paul gets vulgar and graphic to make his point that finding lasting peace and real success only come through being intimately involved with Jesus. The King James Version of the Bible comes the closest to translating this properly. Paul was saying that everything we chase after in this world is crap compared to coming to know Jesus Christ. That's as nice and polite as I can put it. It is meant to be even more vulgar. Here is what Paul is saying. Do you think you are successful because you have become the head of a major corporation? That's crap. Do you think you're a pretty good person because you go to church every week and give money? That's crap. Do you think you are pretty smart because you have a Doctor's degree? That's crap. Besides the blood of Jesus Christ, whatever we depend upon to be in a right relationship with God, is nothing but pure crap. Whatever we have been depending upon to feel secure, whatever we have been depending upon to feel successful, whatever we have been depending upon to feel loved or meaningful is crap. It is only the love and blood of Jesus Christ that brings love, peace, fulfillment and joy to our lives. Our complete identity must be wrapped up in the fact that we are children of God and we received that status by the blood of Jesus Christ. I'm sorry if that was a little too graphic and vulgar, but believe me, I think Paul means to be even more graphic and vulgar. There is no righteousness, there is no real satisfaction, and there is no real and lasting joy apart from Jesus Christ ... plus or minus nothing. Paul understood this clearly. Because **ONLY THROUGH THE BLOOD OF JESUS CAN WE UNDERSTAND WHAT IS TRULY VALUABLE.**

III. CAN GIVE US THE POWER TO LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE (VS 10-11)

Only Through The Blood Of Jesus Can We Have Power To Successfully Live The Christian Life

Some people never seem to grow in their walk with Christ because they are trying to do everything on their own. The reality is that nothing but the blood of Jesus can give us the power to live the Christian life as described in verses 10-11. In other words, **ONLY THROUGH THE BLOOD OF JESUS CAN WE HAVE POWER TO SUCCESSFULLY LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.** If you look closely at these two verses, you will immediately notice the poetic nature. The first part of verse 10 matches verse 11 and the second part of verse 10 matches the third part of verse 10.

A. THE PURPOSE OF SUFFERING

Let's deal with the purpose of suffering first. Paul says that the goal for us is to fellowship with Jesus in His sufferings and become like him in death. This was what was actually happening in Paul's life. He started from a worldly position of privilege, success, power, and strength. But Jesus made Paul into the man He wanted him to be through a great deal of suffering. Paul's life was one trial after another. It took a lot for God to beat the pride, the arrogance, the self-sufficiency, and other character flaws out of Paul. Paul had to die to himself before he could serve Christ effectively. Paul had to die to himself before he could experience lasting peace and joy.

I don't know where you are at in you walk with Christ, but I am still a little nervous about this whole suffering and death thing. I don't think we need even think about this in terms of suffering unto death. In my relationship with my wife, am I really willing to die to my ego and all my self-interest? Can I serve her like Jesus commands? Am I really willing to give up all my selfish desires? In other words, am I willing to lay down my life to love her like Christ loves the church? How about you husbands and wives out there? Are you really willing to lay down your lives to joyfully serve your spouse?

Dying to myself means that I am willing to forgive others even though I may be right. Dying to myself means that I am willing to love everyone, especially in this local church body. Dying to myself means giving up everything I have been depending on for happiness, security, prestige, power or success other than Jesus.

Let's bring this back to what Paul has been talking about all along. If we all put to death our self-righteousness, if we all put to death our pride and arrogance, if we all put to death our personal agendas in order to love, serve, and support one another, we would be able to achieve and maintain the unity Paul has been talking about, and we would be

able to stand together against the attacks of Satan and this world. That is a tall order.

B. THE POWER OF RESURRECTION

But nevertheless, that's what God expects of us and if we are going to experience the power of resurrection, we can only get there through suffering. Look at what Paul wants out of life. He wants to know Christ. This word "know" in both the Hebrew and the Greek refers to a personal, passionate, and intimate relationship. Is that all we want? Or do we want Jesus plus something else? The something else is always what takes away our joy and peace. I don't know how close I'm getting to this, but I think that each year that passes I get closer. I think I have come to accept this as true, but in my practical everyday life, I sometimes forget it. Knowing Jesus, laying down our lives for Jesus, following Jesus, is what in the end brings lasting peace and joy. There can't be a resurrection without death. If we want to live the power of resurrection life, we must first die to ourselves. **ONLY THROUGH THE BLOOD OF JESUS CAN WE HAVE POWER TO SUCCESSFULLY LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.**

IV. EPILOGUE

We must get to the place where we finally admit that there is absolutely nothing good in me apart from Jesus Christ. When talking about being in a right relationship with God, when talking about having life in proper perspective, when talking about successfully living the Christian life, we must talk in terms of total dependence on Jesus Christ, plus or minus nothing. **IN ORDER TO REALIZE GODLY HUMILITY IN OUR LIVES, WE MUST FIRST COME TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT IT IS NOTHING BUT THE BLOOD OF JESUS THAT ALLOWS US TO BE IN A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, THAT GIVES MEANING TO OUR LIVES, AND EMPOWERS US TO BE ALL THAT GOD CREATED US TO BE.**

We always want to hold on to something worldly. We want to be proud about who we are or what we have accomplished. We want to point to our successes. We want to judge others. But the reality is this. Until we can count everything in our lives as garbage, we can never experience how wonderful God's grace is and how precious the blood of Jesus is. Paul Tournier puts it like this:

"Believers who are the most desperate about themselves are the ones who express most forcefully their confidence in grace ... Those who are the most pessimistic about man are the most optimistic about

God; those who are the most severe with themselves are the ones who have the most serene confidence in divine forgiveness. ... By degrees the awareness of our guilt and of God's grace increase side by side."

Last week I talked about how pathetic and weak my walk with Christ has been. This week I want to say that I am going to purpose in my heart to depend on nothing but the blood of Jesus.

I am going to submit willingly to God making, shaping and molding me into the man he wants me to be. And just perhaps he will use me to be the hero in some new stories He is writing.

How about you, are you also coming to the place where you are not depending on anything but the blood of Jesus?