

I WANT TO KNOW CHRIST

Philippians 3:1-21

Key verse 3:10

“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death....”

In chapter 1, we learned that Paul had a clear life purpose: “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” (1:21) In chapter 2, Paul said “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.” In today’s passage Paul tells us his own personal testimony. The main point of his testimony is, “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection.” Paul had an intensive desire and life goal to know Jesus, especially the power of his resurrection. This kind of life goal made him grow as a truly great and powerful servant of God. May God give us Paul’s heart’s desire and life goal, “to know Christ and the power of his resurrection.”

First, that I may gain Christ (1-9). Look at verse 1. “Finally, my brothers, 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.” Time and again, Paul urges the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord. The word “rejoice” is repeated in each chapter. It is surprising that Paul writes about joy so much while in prison. At that time, prisons were far worse than today. Today prisoners can watch TV, enjoy a coffee machine and even have a place to work out. But in Paul’s time, prisons might have been a dark dungeon with no lights, rats and mosquitoes and all types of insects crawling around. Still, Paul was joyful and encouraged others to be joyful.

Jesus also talked about joy the most the day before he was crucified. Jesus encouraged his disciples saying, “your grief will turn to joy” and “you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy” (Jn 16:20, 22). Jesus would die on the cross the next day. But he was encouraging others to be joyful. That is what we see in Paul too. Paul had the same attitude as that of Christ. There was no hint of self pity or feelings of sorrow for himself. We can see true joy in the first century Christians as well. Right after Jesus’ crucifixion, they were under fiery persecutions. But all the believers were together, and had everything in common and they rejoiced in the Lord.

Paul said that to rejoice in the Lord is a spiritual safeguard. A complaining spirit is an open door to the devil; but joy and thanksgiving are the best safeguards for our faith. The life of faith is the life of true joy. We must learn to rejoice in Jesus not only in times of abundant blessings, but also in times of hardship and sorrow, so that our lives may be pleasing to God.

Look at verse 2. "Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh." These days, dogs are the best friends to many people, especially to lonely Americans. But at that time, dogs were treated as unclean, disgusting animals. Then who were the dogs that Paul warned against? They were legalistic people who said, "Unless you are circumcised like us, you cannot be saved" (Ac 15:1). They asked, "Are you circumcised?" If the answer was "No," then they said to themselves, "Hmm. You are a Gentile 'dog.'" But Paul called them 'dogs,' because their desires were physical, not spiritual. Paul declares in verse 3, "For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh."

In order to discredit the self-righteousness of legalistic people, Paul introduces his credentials, based on his background and achievements. Look at verses 4b-6. "If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless." According to these verses, Paul was proud of his national identity as a real Jew. He was a direct descendant of Abraham. He was from the family line of Benjamin, from which many renowned kings and generals came. He was a religious leader, a Pharisee. He became a ringleader in persecuting the Christian churches. In short, Paul was a member of the elite and a promising leader by human standards. By legalistic standards, he was faultless and perfect. However, when he met the Risen Jesus, he was completely changed from a legalistic, proud and self-righteous man into a humble servant of God. After conversion, he lost everything in order to gain Christ. His life purpose was completely changed from a man of selfish ambition to a man in Christ.

Look at verses 7-8. "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing

Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ..." These verses express Paul's value system in Christ so excellently. Paul found real treasure in Jesus. Paul was like a man who found a treasure in a field, and then sold all his possessions and bought that field, or like a pearl merchant who found one of great value and sold all he had and bought it. In the past, Paul had spent so much time to obtain worldly treasures and academic achievements. But now, he considered them as garbage because of the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus. He had lost everything for the sake of Christ, but he did not regret it at all.

Look at verse 9, "...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 and is by faith." Here "be found in him" means to discover oneself in Jesus. Paul discovered himself in Jesus as a wretched sinner before God. He now understood that he could not gain Christ by observing the law with his own righteousness, but only by faith in Christ. Thank God that there are many servants of God, even among us, who have found real value in Christ and consider their human achievements and titles as rubbish for the sake of knowing Christ. Some gave up honorable titles like professor, ambassador, judge or medical doctor, leaving their comfortable homes to go out as missionaries. Our human achievement is indeed nothing compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ. To Paul, Jesus was everything.

Second, "I want to know Christ" (10-11). Look at verses 10-11. "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead." These verses are the key point of Paul's testimony. Here we learn three things.

Firstly, Paul's heart's desire. When I ask students, "What do you want in your life?" many answer, "I don't know." Many people don't know what they really want. But Paul knew what he wanted. Paul wanted to know Christ. It was his heart's desire. What is your heart's desire? Most people want money or recognition, thinking this will make them happy. But Paul was most happy to know Christ. When a man gets older, his Christian life can become habitual and relaxed. But Paul in his old age, was still on fire with passion and heart's desire to know Christ better. Saying, "I want to know Christ"

while doing nothing will lead us nowhere. But when we have a heart's desire and struggle to know Christ, then God will help us to know him.

Secondly, Paul's life goal. Paul's life goal was to know Christ, the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings and the power of his resurrection. Paul had many desires in Jesus. Among them, the highest desire was to know the power of Jesus' resurrection. The power of Jesus was revealed through his resurrection from the dead. Paul wanted to know the power of this resurrection because it is the only source of power that enables one to overcome the power of death. Because of Paul's intensive desire to know the power of his resurrection, he was willing to participate in the sufferings of Jesus, becoming like him in his death. To know the power of Jesus' resurrection, there is one absolute requirement: it is to participate in his sufferings. "Sufferings" sounds like a bad word. But without participating in Jesus' sufferings, no one can experience the power of his resurrection. To participate in his suffering is like dying to oneself. That's why Paul said, "I die every day." Without dying to oneself, no one can experience the power of his resurrection.

We learn the principle of resurrection: "No pain, no gain; no cross, no crown; no death, no resurrection; no study, no A." Paul knew the resurrection principle so well. Once, Paul was preaching the gospel. Some Jews came and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, thinking he was dead. His fellow workers gathered around him for the preparation of his funeral service. But Paul got up and went back into the city. He told the Christians there, "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God." This is resurrection faith. Paul had already suffered so much in the course of world mission work (2 Cor 11). Even so, Paul still wanted to participate in Jesus' sufferings. Paul accepted all kinds of hardships as opportunities to experience the power of Jesus' resurrection.

One young man thought, if he were a fellowship leader in our church, he would be the most fruitful leader. However, as soon as he became a fellowship leader, several disciple candidates ran away. To make it worse, he lost his job. Then he suffered from migraine headaches. At his time of human limitation and deep despair, he accepted Philippians 3:10 as his key verse to learn the power of Jesus' resurrection. Later, God blessed his decision in many ways. God blessed him to establish a house church with a beautiful prayer mother. God restored his job and health. Most of all, God revived his

fellowship to be a fruitful ministry. Here we learn that to know the power of his resurrection is the solution to all life problems. When we know the power of his resurrection, we can overcome human limitations, despair and defeatism and live a victorious life.

Thirdly, Paul's hope. Look at verse 11. "...and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead." This verse shows Paul's ultimate hope. He had a glorious future hope in the risen Jesus. His life would not end in death; even if he died, he would live again in Jesus. Because of this glorious hope, Paul was willing to participate in the sufferings of Jesus and die to himself every day.

Third, "I press on toward the goal" (12-16). Look at verse 12. "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me." Paul's attitude to hold on to Jesus was like that of a runner running to get the prize. Paul's goal was the same as Christ's goal for him. When I invite students to Bible study many say, "I've already studied the Bible in grade school." It means, "I've done enough." Paul was already a great champion of faith and a spiritual general who had won many victories in spiritual warfare (2Ti 4:7,8). But he said, "I'm not done yet."

Look at verses 13-14. "Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." These verses describe Paul's endless struggle toward the goal. He had already achieved great work of God, pioneering many churches and raising numerous disciples of Jesus in many places. In one's old age, it's time to sit down, enjoy God's blessings and become complacent, and move into a retirement home in Panama. But Paul was not complacent. He was still running, straining toward what is ahead. He decided to forget about all his past achievements and successes as well as painful events and failures. He was still pressing on to win the prize—the crown of eternal life and everlasting glory in heaven. Paul did so because his goal was not in this world but in heaven. He never stopped growing, but engaged in spiritual struggle and kept growing. In verse 15, Paul says, "All of us who are mature should take such a view of things."

Look at verse 17. "Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we

gave you.” Paul encourages the Philippians to follow his example. Who can dare tell someone else, “Follow my example”? But Paul did so because he himself followed the example of Jesus. Any parent knows that a child learns best not by the parent’s instructions or rebuke but by their example. It is far better for the parent to display love than to teach it. The principle is the same in discipleship ministry. May God raise many exemplary parents and shepherds in America and make us a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Look at verses 18-19. “For as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.” Who are the enemies of the cross of Christ? They are those who live to gratify their physical desires, in an easy-going, comfortable, suffering-free lifestyle. Their catchphrase is, “If it feels good, do it.” They avoid the cross of Jesus by all means. They may claim that they are saved. But their personal lives are materialistic and their minds are consumed with earthly things. Paul cried many tears because of their corrupted lifestyle. Paul knew their destiny is destruction. What is the conclusion of Paul’s testimony?

Look at verses 20-21. “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” Paul was eagerly waiting for the second coming of Jesus that his lowly body would be transformed to be like Jesus’ glorious body. That was Paul’s goal. This should be our ultimate goal in our Christian life.

From today’s passage, we learn from Paul, his heart’s desire and life goal. It was to know Christ and the power of his resurrection. While preparing this message I realized that I do not have any life goal. I wanted to raise several disciples. But this could not be my life goal. Through this message I deeply repented and accepted Paul’s desire and life goal as my own. I make a decision to accept Php 3:10 as my life goal key verse. May God plant in your heart Paul’s utmost desire and life goal, “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection.”