

NAZARENE BIBLE COLLEGE

Chapel Message; Tuesday, March 27, 2007

Philippians 3:1-11

“As for me and my house, we will _____ the Lord!” (serve, obey) I would like to insert another word into that sentence. “As for me and my house, we will **KNOW** the Lord.” The Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote, “all people desire knowledge.” A father of modern science, Sir Francis Bacon, wrote “knowledge is power!” A few years ago, a customer in a car insurance commercial cried out in frustration: “I don’t know enough to know that I don’t know.” Ever feel like that?!? We **ARE** about knowledge here at NBC and rightly so. But the medieval monk Bernard of Clairvaux had it right: “there are some who want knowledge just for the sake of knowing; that is unseemly curiosity. There are some who seek knowledge in order to be known themselves; that is unseemly vanity. There are those who seek knowledge in order to sell it for money or for honors; that is unseemly quest for gain. **BUT** there are those who seek knowledge in order to edify; that is charity (genuine love for God and others).” Oswald Chambers wrote: “we slander God by our eagerness to work for Him without really **KNOWING** Him.” Knowledge **IS** power. And we **ARE** about gaining knowledge here at NBC. But not knowledge just for knowledge sake. Instead, gaining knowledge so that we might be empowered for effective and fruitful kingdom service. Paul wrote, “I want to know Christ” – there is no greater thing!! Tonight, let’s look together at Paul’s perspective on knowledge and knowing.

*****First, notice what Paul had known – DEAD END PAST.** Paul cautions the Philippians here about the Judaizers who made observance of the Mosaic law the basis of spiritual experience. They insisted that non-Jewish Christians observe circumcision and other Jewish practices. In Galatians, Paul declared that Christians were no longer enslaved to the demands of the Jewish law; they had won their freedom in Christ. Salvation comes not by adherence to the law or any kind of human effort but by personal faith in Christ.

So, watch out for those dogs; those mutilators of the flesh (ouch!); **WE** are the true circumcision who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus; who put no confidence in the flesh. Romans 2 – “circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, NOT by the written code. Galatians 6 – “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what **COUNTS** (remember the word COUNTS) is a new creation.”

Paul then uses his own experience to illustrate his point. He knew all about the Judaizers; he had been there and done that. It's not about outward circumcision, the written code, or any human effort. If this were the case, I had all the reasons in the world to put confidence in those things. Paul's seven different qualifications, from a human standpoint, had plenty of value - borne in a home of wealth and culture; living in one of the most progressive of ancient cities; attending one of the best schools of theology in Jerusalem to learn at the feet of the great Gamaliel. He had the best of the best. Paul could put up a “better record in the flesh” than most anybody – orthodox upbringing, significant achievement in the spiritual and moral realm; he believed that all this put him in

good standing with God. Paul (Saul) seemingly had all the right knowledge and all the right connections to guarantee success in life.

And, yet, from bitter experience Paul says none of this brought him a personal knowledge of God. He had excelled in the Judaism of his day, achieving a position of power and influence. Acts 7 – and those who stoned Stephen (the first Christian martyr) “laid their clothes at the feet of the young man Saul, who was there giving approval to Stephen’s death.” But, all those things blinded him to the truth; they actually kept him from God. Suddenly, Paul knew that he was completely ignorant about the most important thing a person could experience – a right relationship with God. Filled with knowledge and the power that came with it, Paul was starving to death.

How many of us would testify to a similar condition BC – before Christ. It’s good to recall those things from time to time isn’t it? We may not be able to relate to Paul’s experience at all. But we were full of ourselves and on a dead end road to nowhere. We had placed our trust in a host of things except the one thing – the One person – who could deliver us from our deep-seated self-centeredness, spiritual blindness, and separation from God.

We know that a mark of 21st century postmodern America is its spiritual quest; folks searching in every nook and cranny for answers to life’s essential questions. Inquiring minds and hearts truly want to KNOW. People chasing spiritual gurus, New Age practitioners, Eastern religious rites, or drawing from a smorgasbord of ideas and practices to create their own designer religion. All the new messiahs say with great assurance that the power to save lies within us if

we only look hard enough. That's what our culture knows but it amounts to a spiritual dead end. Paul had known confidence in the flesh imparted through his deeply embedded Jewish roots but it, too, was a spiritual dead end.

*****Second, notice what Paul came to know – decisive encounter.** In a nutshell, Paul encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus. Knowledge **IS** power and Paul discovered the surpassing greatness of knowing Jesus. Here we see the apostles' redemption story built on an analogy from the business world. The believers in the prosperous gold-producing region of Macedonia would have understood his language of profit and loss. In verses 7 and 8, Paul refers to "loss" three different times. To begin with, Paul testifies, he looked over the worldly achievements of his dead end past, added it all up, and now considered it loss. The great reversal – those things moved decisively from the profit column to the loss column. What is more, he says, I now consider EVERYTHING a loss. And, further still, because of the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord (**MY** Lord), **I have lost ALL things.**

The picture here from Paul is of a seaman throwing everything overboard in a storm to save his life. Paul's storm came on the road to Damascus. Bible scholar F. F. Bruce wrote, "Paul's trusted foundation of legal righteousness collapsed beneath his feet on the Damascus road, when he suddenly saw himself to be the chief of sinners." Paul said in Galatians 2 that he was done with law-keeping righteousness – "I died to the law so that I might live for God . . . I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained (GAINED!) through

the law, then Christ died for nothing” (Gal. 2:19-21). Paul’s life was radically altered by his Damascus road encounter with the resurrected Lord. “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!” {PAUSE}

Many of you are familiar with the story of Jim Elliott, missionary to the Huaroni (Hu-ron-i) Indians of Ecuador. He and three of his missionary friends were attacked and brutally killed in 1956. The movie *End of the Spear* tells the story from the perspective of pilot Nick Saint. But, some time before his death, Jim Elliott wrote these gripping words in his journal: “he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain (to **GAIN**) that which he cannot lose.” A. W. Tozer, in his book *Pursuit of God*, wrote, “here is the sweet theology of the heart, which can be learned only in the school of renunciation.”

For Paul, what was profit became loss and in losing everything he found the greatest profit of all. Oh, the blessed subtraction – all those things are but rubbish, dung, “foul smelling garbage fit only for dogs.” Blessed subtraction – yes – but, oh, the life transforming gain of the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ. Every day, Paul says, I count ALL THINGS of lesser value compared to being “found in Him” not having a righteousness from the law but a righteousness that comes only through faith in Christ.

Educators talk about “cognitive dissonance.” New knowledge that conflicts with or enlarges our current understanding, it unsettles us. It takes us out of our comfort zone. Perhaps you’ve experienced that here. Well, on the road to Damascus, we might say, Paul experienced some major cognitive dissonance;

some major cardiac dissonance. His spiritual world was turned upside down and inside out; and every which way but loose. Knowledge **IS** power. And Paul discovered a new knowledge base, one that completely transformed his outlook - from self-reliance or reliance upon his religious heritage to the centering of his life in the transforming knowledge of Jesus Christ. I hear the words of Isaac Watts sounding forth: "When I survey the wondrous Cross, on which the Prince of Glory died; my richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride." Praise God tonight for the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord.

{TRANSITION}: *First*, Paul had known the dead end past of placing confidence in legalistic righteousness. But, his Damascus road encounter opened his eyes to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus his Lord.

*****Third, notice what Paul desired to know: deeper experience of conformity to Christ.**

"I want to know Christ!" in the most intimate way of knowing and relating. And, beginning in verse 10, Paul tells us exactly what this meant. I want to know Christ - "the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His suffering." These two things go together; two sides of the same coin. Paul wanted to know this resurrection power and this sharing in suffering **SO THAT** he might become more like Jesus in His death.

I want to know the power of His resurrection. Paul desired that the very power that raised Jesus from the dead would flow through His veins. It is this power that

saves to the core of our being, empowers for service, and conforms us more and more to the image of Christ. Paul wrote in Ephesians 1 about “His incomparably great power for all who believe. That power is like the working of His mighty strength, exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.” Romans 6: “just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life . . . the death He died, He died to sin once for all, but the life He lives, He lives to God. IN THE SAME WAY, count yourselves dead to sin but ALIVE to God in Christ Jesus.” Finally, Romans 8: “and if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who lives in you.”

Knowledge **IS** power. As F. F. Bruce wrote, “this is the resurrection power which enables the believer to resist the enticements of sin and lead to a life of holiness which pleases God.” It is this power that delivered Paul from the dominion of darkness; from his dead end past. It is by this power that we “put on the new self which is being renewed in KNOWLEDGE in the image of its Creator.” It is this power that enables us to “offer to God the parts of our body (all we have; all we are) to Him as instruments of righteousness” so we might faithfully further the cause of Christ.

We live in the power of the resurrection but we are forever marked by the cross. “I want to know Christ and share in the fellowship of His sufferings.” Paul was in prison when he wrote Philippians. He’s saying: I want to know the “koinonia of the Cross.” In chapter one, Paul wrote: “it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in Him but to suffer for Him?” Romans 8:

“we are co-heirs with Christ if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may share in His glory.” Paul clearly believed that to suffer for Christ was to be the expectation if not the privilege for all believers.

Now you and I may not face persecution like Paul and other Christians have been called upon to endure. But in a variety of ways in ministry we WILL be called upon to suffer, to pay the price, to go the second mile, to sacrifice for Christ and the kingdom. This is at the very heart of Christian service. British evangelical John Stott wrote: “the place of suffering in service and passion in ministry is hardly ever taught today. But the greatest single secret of evangelistic or missionary effectiveness is the willingness to suffer and die. It may be death to popularity by faithfully teaching an unpopular message; or death to pride; or death to material comfort; it may be death to _____ (you fill in the blank). But the servant of the Lord must suffer . . . to bring light to the nations; the seed must die if it is to multiply.”

Jesus suffered on the Cross but was raised in power from the grave. Paul threw himself into kingdom service with holy abandon, with rejoicing and thanksgiving – not because he enjoyed suffering, BUT because Christ’s resurrection (and the power of it) gave him the proper perspective and the gracious sufficiency to endure. Philippians, chapter 1 – “I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage, so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain (GAIN).” Paul says, if I must suffer – even die – for my Lord, then so be it. In suffering we, too, come to know Jesus more

fully; to walk with Him more closely. In our suffering we show Jesus to the world. When we live in the fullness of Christ's resurrection power, we are enabled to persevere with boldness in all circumstances, giving witness to our living Lord and bearing fruit for the kingdom. {Pause}

Paul counted all things as loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus His Lord. Paul lived daily in the fullness of resurrection power. Paul threw himself completely into kingdom service even in the face of severe hardship and suffering. And all this brings us to his supreme desire - to become more like Him in His death. The Christian life is a cross life. It is having the mind of Christ, as Paul wrote in Philippians 2, "though Jesus was in very nature God He did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. He made Himself nothing; took on the nature of a servant; was made in human likeness. Jesus humbled Himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross."

It is this self-emptying that Paul is talking about. His supreme desire is to die as Christ died – to be crucified with Christ, that he would no longer live but Christ would live through him. Even deeper – the most radical work of God's transforming grace - Paul desired to die so completely to self that his life would conform more and more to the image of Christ. We empty ourselves and we keep on emptying. We die; we keep on dying. As Wesley said, "so as to be dead to all things here below."

George Muller, a past spiritual giant, wrote: "there was a day when I died; utterly died. Died to George Muller – his opinions, preferences, tastes, and will;

died to the world, its approval or censure; died to the approval or blame even of my brothers and friends. And, since then, I have studied to show myself approved unto God.”

C. S. Lewis wrote: “Christ says, ‘give me all. I don’t want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work. **I WANT YOU**. No half-measures are any good. I don’t want to cut off a branch here and a branch there. I want to have the whole tree down. I don’t want to drill the tooth, or crown it, but I want to have it out. Hand over the whole self. I will give you Myself; my own will shall become yours.”

One writer more recently put it this way, “Jesus was an important part of my life, but he was like one spoke of a wheel. There were other spokes too – my ministry, my marriage, my children, my love of sports. But although he was one of the important spokes, **I WAS THE HUB**. Then, during a retreat Jesus confronted me and said: “I don’t want to just be a spoke. *I want to be the hub*. I want to be at the center of everything you are, everything you do. Will you turn over everything to me in such a way that I am the hub?”

That is the deeper experience of total surrender to Christ, completely dying out to self; daily becoming more and more like Jesus our Lord. I would imagine that everyone here has had a Damascus road encounter. You experienced newness of life in Christ. We praise God for the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus as Savior and Lord. But the question still remains – have you died completely to self and to the world? Have you consecrated your all to Him; no half measures will do? Is Jesus only one spoke of the wheel or is He truly the

hub of it all? Have you fully surrendered and experienced that deeper death to self so that Christ can have complete control. "Knowing you Jesus, knowing you; there is no greater thing!" Knowledge **IS** power. Knowing Jesus in this way and becoming more like him puts us on a path of daily obedience and fruitful service. Do you know Jesus in this way tonight? As we finish out, I invite you to pray as the Spirit may be speaking to your heart.