

A Gospel Righteousness **Philippians 3:1-11**

Preached at 8.15, C@10 and CC on Sunday 8th March 2015

Introduction

When Paul McCartney came to Australia in 1992 I just had to go.

Out of all the other options there were for entertainment that year, I would have happily passed them all up for the opportunity to see one of the Beatles live.

Nothing else could compare with that experience.

My band, The Ancients, cover lots of Beatles songs. We love to play them and we do a pretty fair job with most of them.

But I wouldn't even try to compare our versions to the Beatles.

There's just no comparison.

It would be like comparing dinner in Jamie Oliver's restaurant with a cheeseburger at Macca's.

Imagine if I had the opportunity to go backstage at that Paul McCartney concert and meet the man himself.

Do you think I'd say 'Gee I loved hearing you play all your songs – but you should hear our versions!'

Do you think he'd be impressed?

No, I probably wouldn't even want to own up to trying to play and sing his songs.

I'd be so wrapped up in the opportunity to know Paul McCartney that I'd probably forget I was even in a band myself!

Compared to knowing him, all my efforts at singing his songs would seem like rubbish.

Ridiculous as it seems, many people think that somehow God is impressed when we have a go at doing what he's already done.

Through the gospel God has saved us by sending his Son to do what we could never do – that is, make ourselves good enough for God.

Worthy of the gospel...

In this part of the Bible, Philippians 3, we're continuing to see what it looks like to live in a manner worthy of the gospel...

To live in a manner worthy of the gospel means your thinking and acting has been changed as you've understood that Jesus' death and resurrection makes a difference.

The gospel brings a different way of living and thinking about life.

It's a very practical difference – not just that we believe certain things about God – but we live differently and think differently about life.

Last week in 2:19-30 we looked at two examples of people as they lived in a manner worthy of the gospel – Timothy and Epaphroditus.

Timothy and Epaphroditus are examples of people who've been changed by the gospel to think and live differently.

We saw Timothy put the interests of others before his own because he's convinced that, through the gospel, God is taking care of his interests.

Epaphroditus could give up his own life to serve in gospel ministry because he's convinced through the gospel that his life is secure for eternity.

They were seeking to live lives worthy of the gospel – not to impress God, but because they'd come to love God because of his love for them in Jesus.

Their obedience was their right response to being right with God – not what made them acceptable to God.

Our obedience to God in seeking to live right lives shaped by the gospel is our right response to what he's done. But it doesn't earn us anything by impressing God.

Joy and Right Confidence

In the beginning of this chapter it tells us that the gospel is the source of joy.

To "rejoice in the Lord" means to rejoice that Jesus has died and risen as Lord of all people to give us a new life with God that extends beyond the grave.

Where do you look to find joy in your life?

Some of us find our joy in our friendships – in having people who like us.

Some of us find our joy in our families... or in a romantic relationship.

Some of us find our joy in our abilities – artistic or sporting or intellectual abilities.

It's not wrong to enjoy any of these things, until they become the ultimate source of our joy.

... because when they do, they'll eventually disappoint us.

I went to school with a guy who was a talented guitarist, but unfortunately became a pot-smoker, which gave him MS and robbed him of his source of joy. About 2 years ago Richard took his own life.

Friendships might sour...our kids might not turn out the way we might have liked... and what we relied on for our joy, disappoints us.

But the gospel gives a joy that will never fade or disappoint.

Through Jesus' death and resurrection, we become loved children of God with a permanent place in his family.

To rejoice in the Lord is to be joyful and thankful that God has done that.

Through the gospel we have a solid reason for confident joy.

False confidence

But straight away Paul sounds a warning about how we can be robbed of this joy, as he warns in v2 about a group of people he calls – ‘dogs, evil-doers, and mutilators of the flesh’!

Doesn't sound like he liked them much, does it?

... and for good reason.

This is a warning against putting our confidence in anything other than the gospel to have and to keep our relationship with God.

That's what these people were encouraging Christians to do.

We call them ‘Judaizers’.

They were Jews who were trying to convince Christian churches that believing in Jesus wasn't enough to be confident that you have a reason to be joyful.

The gospel isn't enough. Knowing Jesus isn't enough.

If you want to be confident that you're acceptable to God, you have to have all the marks of religion.

For Jews, God had given them the sign of circumcision as part of the Law to signify that they were God's people – so every male Israelite was circumcised when he was 8 days old as a sign that Israel were God's saved people.

The sign itself didn't make them God's people. It was a sign of what God had done.

If it was thought of rightly, the sign of circumcision meant everything.

But if it wasn't, then it meant nothing.

My wedding ring doesn't make me married to Sue.

My wedding ring is a *sign* that I married Sue. The sign doesn't mean anything if it's separated from what it means.

The sign of circumcision meant nothing if it was separated from what it meant – that is, that God has saved his people.

God gave Israel his Law, including the sign of circumcision, after saving them and bringing them to himself.

They were to follow and obey God's Law because He had saved them.

But Israel had turned the Law into what made them acceptable to God.

The sign of circumcision should have meant "I am saved, therefore I obey the Law".

They had turned it into "I obey the Law, therefore I am saved".

So all their religious observance meant nothing.

And these people were coming into churches telling Christians that they had to observe the Jewish religion as well as believe in Jesus – if they wanted to be confident of being accepted by God.

But it's only through the gospel we can be confident that we are loved and accepted by God.

So Paul says in the next verse that it's

we (Christians) *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***

We don't become accepted by God through the gospel and then stay acceptable to him through our best efforts at obeying him.

The only way to be confident that we're loved and accepted by God is if we put no confidence in ourselves or in what we do.

If religious observance is the way to know you're right with God, Paul has plenty going for him.

He's got an impressive Jewish pedigree, and his zeal for obeying the Law before he met Jesus was streets ahead of anyone else.

But through the gospel he's come to a new way of understanding life...

... that's this: None of his proud Jewish heritage or his impressive religious observance gains him anything with God.

In fact he's come to realise that it's all rubbish compared to knowing Jesus as his Lord.

...

Friends, there are three ways you can think about life.

You can live as if God doesn't exist, doesn't matter or doesn't care – so live as you like and hope for the best.

Or you can put your confidence in your own goodness and doing the right thing in the hope that will be good enough for God.

Or you can know Jesus... you can believe the gospel.

Only one of those ways can give you confidence that you're accepted and loved by God with a lasting reason for joy.

Christianity is NOT about being a religious person – it's about knowing Jesus.

He's *made* us acceptable to God through what *he's* done – not through what we do after we believe in him.

That's what it means in v9 when Paul says

"not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law (i.e. through his obedience), but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith." (Philippians 3:9 NIV)

Friends, it's a fine line to cross over from living obediently because of the gospel into thinking I'm acceptable to God because of my obedience.

When you cross that line, your confidence is no longer in Jesus, it's in your flesh – in yourself and your own effort.

And it's like saying to Jesus "you're an added extra – I don't really need you".

You've thrown the gospel away. You're treating your own efforts as your righteousness – what makes you right with God... and the gospel like rubbish.

Coming to church, being generous with your money, being generous with your time, doing your best at living the Christian life... all good things.

But if you think they're to your profit – that they contribute to your standing with God, listen again to what Paul says about his list in verse 9...

"I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him."

It's hard for us to hear because we want to say 'I'm not that bad – I do my best at living a good life.

There are churches in Sydney being fed that lie this morning/weekend – read your Bible, do what it says, do ministry, give generously... and God will bless you.

The gospel says 'put no confidence in yourself and your own efforts – accept the free gift of right standing with God that only comes through faith in Christ who has already saved you.

That's the only way to know the certainty of a life of acceptance with God, and a life of lasting joy as his dearly loved child.

Application

Friends, there's nothing we can put our confidence in for a life that delivers lasting joy that compares with knowing Jesus.

If you rely on your own goodness or religiousness it will lead you in either of two directions:

Either it will lead you to despair – thinking that you aren't good enough for God so you can't confidently know you're loved by God and that your life is safe with him forever...

Or it will lead you to pride – thinking that you are good enough for God because you think your goodness and religiousness are what makes you good enough.

And both ways are dead ends.

The only through road is the gospel – knowing Jesus.

Nothing compares to knowing Jesus.

To truly know Jesus is to treat whatever else you might think is to your credit as rubbish... whatever you might have thought was to your profit with God is a total loss... it's worth nothing...

...compared to knowing Jesus.

If you've come to church today thinking that living good life makes you acceptable to God, understand that your best efforts count for nothing.

If you've come thinking your failures make you unacceptable to God, understand that even your best efforts count for nothing.

And understand that your failures as you try to live for God have been forgiven through Jesus.

Do you want the assurance that you will have a life of lasting joy with God?

Believe the gospel... keep believing the gospel every day... trust always and only in who Jesus is and what he has done.

Never put your confidence in who you are or what you do.

If you believe the gospel, you know Jesus...

and you can be rightly confident that he has saved you to enjoy a life of lasting joy, in spite of your failures.