I WANT TO KNOW CHRIST

Philippians 3:1-14 (Key Verse: 3:10)

*“I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, …”*

As people I would like to believe that we are after joy, we want to be happy. Students come to various institutions of higher learning in order to make a better life for themselves. After graduating we after some meaningful purpose in life for our joy. It could be furthering your studies, a super career, marriage, having and raising children, serving others in some ways in our community the list goes on. However, life is filled with all kinds of ups and downs, some people are or took longer time to complete their studies, struggles in finding a suitable job, finding a life purpose, being or getting married, sin, sickness and so on. The question is, have we found our source of joy or are we still looking for our joy? What is our coping mechanism in this life? What is your end goal? What actually propels you to be here today? Last night when you going to bed, what made you say, tomorrow I am going to church? What actually makes you a Christian, a follower of Christ Jesus? What does it mean to you to follow Jesus? Are we here today because of somebody else? Whom are we here for and for whom are we trying to please? In the midst of what we call life, apostle Paul, through this passage reveals what actually propels him forward as a servant of Christ Jesus. He is writing this letter while in prison, in the midst of suffering, yet we can sense his great joy and hope in the lord. His hopes are high and he is greatly looking forward to something. He wants to know Christ! What does it mean to know Christ Jesus? May the Lord grant us one word, in what it means to know Christ Jesus, such that we will count all human efforts to attain salvation as garbage and worthless. May no suffering in this world diminish the hope and joy we have in Jesus, rather may we use it as an opportunity to know Jesus. Amen!

Look at verse 1, “Further, my brothers and sisters, 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.” The theme on rejoicing in the lord seems to be something that Apostle Paul keeps talking. It is a theme that is about our hearts, fundamentally a theme on where our hearts are? That is why he says, rejoice in the lord. It is not just rejoice, but rather rejoice in the Lord. However, what does it mean to rejoice in the lord? It means our joy is not based on circumstances or things. I mean we all know that circumstances change, and number of them not even in our control. To rejoice in Jesus means our joy is based on a person and not things. Things change and persons also do change. However, the bible teachers us that Jesus never changes, he is the same yesterday today and forevermore. Jesus is our firm foundation whom no one will ever be disappointed if they placed their trust in him. That that is God’s promise.

So when Apostle Paul says it is no trouble to write the same things again, he means that, he is glad to be doing it over again. He feels no resistance to do it. Because it is a safeguard to us. This theme of the importance of being in Christ Jesus, where our hearts are focused on Christ Jesus, Paul will never grow weary in reminding us about it. Because it is our safeguard as believers. It is an important theme because it differentiates Christians, true believers from false believers. Why was it so important for Paul to keep reminding the church, to safeguard them to keep focused on being in Christ Jesus? It was because at this point in time the Philippian church was a mixture of Jews and Gentiles and there was a growing false teachings from Jewish traditions.

Look at verse 2, “Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh.” In those days dogs were not pets but scavengers along the streets. In Revelation 22:15 it reads, “Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.” Such evil characters were referred to as dogs. They are seen as evildoers and mutilators of the flesh. Now mutilators of the flesh are those who emphasize circumcision and Paul calls them dogs. Apostle Paul warns the Philippian church to watch out of these false believers. They were false teachers who had infiltrated the Church. Paul calls them dogs and evildoers. Why does Paul use such strong language? It is because these were false teachers and believers who were placing confidence in the flesh for salvation. Flesh refers to human achievement and credentials apart from Christ Jesus. In verse 3 Paul says, “For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh.” However Paul says, it is we who have the true circumcision, the ones who serve God by his spirit. We boast not through achievement and performance based Christianity, but rather boast in Christ Jesus. Our confidence is in Jesus for salvation and not the flesh. These Judaizers came into the Church had some form of believe in Jesus, however Jesus was not enough for salvation. They insisted that believers were not saved unless they are circumcised. Imagine it means that, they need a human person for salvation, because someone had to come and conduct the circumcision. It means the blood of Jesus was not enough. That is why Paul came hard with his warning against such false teaching.

Look at verse 4, “though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more:” However Paul on the other hand had more reasons to place confidence in the flesh. He knew all about the Judaism and had practiced many of their sticked rules and laws, yet Paul still came out and said, it is all a waste, it is all garbage towards salvation. From verses 5-6 Paul expresses reasons why he could place confidence in the flesh.

Look at verse 5-6, “5circumcised 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; 6as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.” **Firstly, salvation is NOT by ritual**. I was circumcised on the eighth day. In a number of old testament books, Genesis 17:12, Genesis 21:4, Leviticus 12:31, God institutes circumcision, that physical operation as a sign of His people. And He said it is to be done on the eighth day after a male child is born. That was a strict Jewish rite. And so Paul is saying, with regard to me, I was circumcised on the eighth day. I went through the basic ritual of Judaism, the rite and ceremony by which you are initiated into the covenant people. And so Paul uses this one first, because circumcision was the Judaizers big issue. Paul is saying, I am a legitimate Jew by birth, circumcised the eighth day, a true blooded Jew, nursed in the ceremonies of my ancestral religion.

**Secondly, Paul says salvation is NOT by race.** If anybody had a right to boast, he could, because not only was he circumcised the eighth day, but he is of the nation of Israel. The Old Testament is filled with the teaching that the children of Israel were the covenant people, they were God's chosen people, it was on them that He set His love. However, no religious virtue is gained by birth. There are people today who want to affirm household salvation. They think when parents are saved that the children born of those parents are in covenant relationship to God. Your religious family grants you no standing with God. The fact that you were born into a Christian family grants you no standing with God, no salvation, it's useless, it's garbage, it's rubbish.

**Fourthly, salvation is NOT by tradition.** He says, "A Hebrew of Hebrews." Now there might be several ways to understand what he means by that, a number of commentators say, when Paul says, "I am a Hebrew child of Hebrew parents." In other words, I've maintained my tradition. Jews had been scattered all around, including perhaps these in Philippi. And having been scattered around they were greatly impacted by Greek culture. Many of them lost the Hebrew language and when they lost the language they lost the culture, they lost their tradition. And Paul is saying, though I was raised in a pagan city. He had remained faithful and personally committed to the tradition of Judaism and the language of his parents."

**Fifth, salvation is NOT by religion.** look at verse 5 again, "As to the law, a Pharisee." Paul had lived his life according to the Pharisaic law and here he says the same thing [Acts 26:5]. He says, "When it comes to the law, I was a Pharisee." It was the highest level of religious achievement in Judaism. You can't get any higher than being a Pharisee. The Pharisee was the religious radical fundamentalist, the narrow-minded legalistic fundamentalist who interpreted the Word of God specifically, directly to life. Not all of the Pharisees were snakes and vipers, hypocrites, blind leaders, robbers, envious, jealous and proud fakers. Some of them were serious minded. They were trying their best to achieve status with God through religion.

**Sixth, salvation is NOT by sincerity**. In verse 6 he says, "as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless." Paul was a persecutor of the church. Paul was so he killed Christians. Paul loved God, he loved the law of God, he loved the Jewish community of God, to such a degree that he hated anything he thought offended God and he thought Christians offended God. And so he killed Christians because of zeal. He created havoc in the church. He killed Christians. He pursued them. He chased them. He wanted to take their life. So if anyone thought got zeal, Paul is saying I got more.

**Lastly, salvation is NOT righteous works.** Verse 6 says, "As to the righteousness which is in the law...I was found blameless." What does that mean? He is saying is this, that with regard to righteousness which is advocated by God's law or the standard of righteous living, no one could find fault in him. He lived a blameless life. By human judgment he was faultless.

And so Paul is saying he was fine, he had all the reason to claim salvation through the flesh through confidence in the flesh until he met Jesus Christ. He then found out that the righteousness of his own was inadequate. That there was a righteousness in Christ that Is by grace. He was given this righteousness by faith and that was the true treasure. He could then count all this other stuff as garbage when he came to know Christ. Look at verse 7, "Whatever things were gain to me, all the stuff of verses 5 and 6, those things I have counted as loss, they had negative contribution to my salvation. In fact to place any hope in them for salvation, they will send you to hell, they are a deception and an illusion of true salvation in Christ Jesus. And so for the sake of Christ Jesus, what I have seen in Jesus, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them but rubbish in order that I might gain Christ. [8]" So that I may be found in Jesus, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in a Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith [9].

The world is filled with the religiously sincere, people very sincere in their religion, make great effort, personal sacrifice, high cost, pay the price wanting to please God. Go to church, some people, every day, many Catholics go every day. People in other religions pray certain prayers every day. Protestants go to church every day, every week. Very sincere in their heart, wanting to do what is right. God is not impressed. Salvation is not by ritual. Salvation is not by race. Salvation is not by maintaining tradition. Salvation does not come through religion and salvation does not come by sincerity. You can have a lot of zeal and be absolutely fatally wrong, and Paul says, "I thought it was right, I considered it garbage when I met Christ." Now instead of focusing his efforts on work based salvation, what then was Paul lifelong passion and zeal? What was this treasure that Paul found? That made him count all confidence in the flesh as worthless garbage?

Let us all read verse 10, “I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,” The word to know here is similar to what was used when Adam new Eve in Genesis. It has a meaning of being intimate with someone. To know them. Paul’s lifelong passion was to know Jesus. He already knew Christ and his grace as he met the risen Christ on the way to Damascus. But this was only the beginning of knowing Jesus. There is more to come. Knowing Christ is unlike any other human relationship. Usually people are disappointed and disillusioned about their friendships or romantic partners after knowing more about them. But Christ is different. The knowledge of Christ empowers us in every way. The more we know Christ, the more we want to know him. Don’t you want to know him more? What does it mean to know Christ in the present time? It is to “know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings.” The power of Christ’s resurrection is the power that defeated sin and death. All people die, but Christ is the conqueror over death. We should not limit him, since he is the eternal Son of God. Knowing Christ is not head knowledge. It’s not theory. It affects us practically. When we are united with Christ by faith, we can experience the power of his resurrection in our everyday lives. When we meet the risen Jesus, we overcome fear, doubts and anxiety. We all want to experience the power of Christ’s resurrection, is it not?

However, verse 10 also says “participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.” We experience the power of Christ’s resurrection by dying to our sins. The subtlest enemy of faith is the recurring temptation to boast about our achievements and works, temptation to value ourselves above others based on our achievements or knowledge. When my proud self is crucified with Christ, I can experience Jesus as supreme Lord in my heart and life. When we die to our pride and selfish ego, we are in essence “united with Christ in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection” (Ro 6:5). We can rather know Jesus in that in dying with Christ, Jesus helped me forgive someone, Jesus helped me love and serve others including those who dislike me. To illustrate this, on social media, I once saw clip of a priest in court say this, “I asked for strength and God gave me difficulties to make me strong. I asked for wisdom and God gave me problems to solve. I asked for courage and God gave me dangers to overcome. I asked for love and God gave me troubled people to help. My prayers were answered.”

No body wants to suffer however suffering is for every Christian. Suffering is a necessary ingredient as we follow Jesus, serving the gospel ministry, looking to the interests of others. The beauty of following Christ is that, when we suffer for Christ’s sake, we enter into a deeper relationship with him, experiencing his nearness, his sweet love and the power of his resurrection. As we do so, we are being transformed into the image of Christ. Then, even prison or the grave cannot stop or defeat us, for Christ always reigns victorious.

Verse 11 says, “and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.” Knowing Christ involves a sure hope of the future, the resurrection from the dead. We are longing to be completely conformed to our Savior. Paul might suffer as a martyr. But he was not afraid of dying because he was sure about the resurrection from the dead. May we not fear death and so I pray that the lord may help us place our confidence in Jesus by faith, he was dead now he lives. Our Lord lives! Therefore rejoice! We die to be resurrected.

I just travelled to Kuruman this past week, while chatting with my mother I somehow noticed something on her pupils (eyes), and so I looked at her eyes attentively. I could see that old age ring, her facial skip was sloppy, degraded unlike how she was while growing up. She actually reminded me of her mom, when I used to visit my grandmother in Mafikeng, she was so old. This made me feel bit sad, a reality that one day I was going to loose her. Her body was even weak, she even recently did a knee operation. Of which she also reminded me that her mother also had a knee problem in her old age. Then a day after I met my neighbour whom we started chatting at the fence. Rre Mashishi, he too was holding a sting to support his walk, told me about his old age body pains, that he was now 75 old, his face also looked sloppy, chicks all sagging. The feeling also hit me, started to feel hopeless, because I was realizing that this was actually my future, I too am growing old. One day my body parts will start failing me. This just made me so fatalistic, discouraged and a huge sense of hopelessness. Realize that death and old age were a guarantee. However, preparing this message has given me some sense of hope. Made me once again realize that, I need to live with resurrection faith. That my passions and goal should be know Jesus, and that I can know him by participating in serving him, leading my family to serve Jesus sacrificially, have fellowship in his sufferings. May my goal be to know Jesus, through my secular job, serving this ministry, serving my family as a husband and father. May I live to know Jesus and participate in his sufferings. This what brings meaning to all of life, old age and even death. May my joy come from living for Jesus and not place any confidene in the flesh. I believe this is how I can be a better father, husband, minister of the word, and be of service to other. So that come my death time, I am rejoicing in Jesus for having served him by faith alone through His grace alone. Amen!

**In conclusion,** Jesus said in Matthew 7 that in the last days many will come and say, "Lord, Lord, but He will confess to them, I have never known you, depart from Me you workers of iniquity." What are you counting on, who are you counting on for your salvation? You're either trusting yourself and your achievements, or Christ. And when you come to trust Christ, all the achievements become rubbish. What is your life goal and passion? Successful career? Happy family? Prosperous ministry? Do you see the surpassing worth of knowing Christ? Our Christian life is not simply about moral living or hard work. It is ultimately about knowing Christ. What does it mean for you to know him? As Paul said, it is to know the matchless love of Christ; to experience the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings; to be fully conformed to the image of Christ; to rejoice in the Lord! The goal of the resurrection, the prize for which we press on now is to know Christ himself. Christ is enough! May God give us power to press on toward the goal! Amen!