

I WANT TO KNOW CHRST

Philippians 3:1-21 (Key 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...

Have you found the most valuable thing in this world or the most worthy thing to live for? Something you are willing to lay down your life for. What is that thing you want more than anything else in this world? Have you ever asked yourself that question, what do I want? What do you consider to be the greatest worthy thing in this life, that you seek to have with all of your heart? I know for students it could be to complete your academic studies, then a good paying job and then for many of us it can be all kinds of things since we are in different stages of our lives. In this passage, Paul reveals the single most one thing he wants, he wants to know Christ. If there was someone who knew Christ it was Paul, yet still the key point in his life is, "I want to know Christ." May we learn from Paul the basic attitude and value system of a mature Christian. Amen.

Let us all remember that Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter. It was not clear whether he was going to be killed or not. He had all the reasons to be distressed and fall into self-pity. He was in prison because of the gospel, and so humanly speaking he had all the reasons to even be angry with the Lord. Yet we find Paul being deeply concerned about the Philippian believers and even commanding them to rejoice in the Lord. The Philippian believers were in danger of being misguided regarding the gospel of Jesus Christ. First, some people were trying to enforce work based righteousness, a kind of righteousness that places confidence in our works. A form of trusting in the law for righteousness before God. Secondly, the other issue was believers whose life focus was only in this world as though there was no kingdom of God beyond this world [18-19]. These were those whom Paul called evil doers who lived for their stomach. When looking at these two issues first group seems very religious and spiritual outwardly because they seek to obey the law of God to achieve righteousness. And the other group of believers are carnal and worldly, only thinking for their stomach without valuing the kingdom of God. It is easy to condemn the second group of believers as compared to the legalistic ones. However, Paul is showing us through this passage that both of these groups of believers do not seek to know Christ Jesus, for if they were seeking to know Jesus Christ they would find a treasure that makes all that they were living for worthless, meaningless and null.

Let us look at what Paul valued the most and why he could have such a value system. In verse 2, Paul warns the Philippians to watch out against those who placed their confidence in the flesh. This is that group of believers who boast on what they are able to do for the Lord. They were enforcing others to rely on obeying the law to be made holy or right with God. Teaching that, unless they are circumcised they have no place in the kingdom of God. They taught a performance based Christianity. Paul says in verse 3, "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." Boasting in Christ Jesus and putting no confidence in the flesh meant that, the work of Jesus on the cross was a complete work of salvation. It was a complete work to make us right before God. It was then nonsensical to put confidence in the flesh for so doing was to nullify the completed work of Jesus on the cross. Though we do need to obey the law of God, we do not obey his law in order to make ourselves right before God. We do not do good and struggle to obey the word of God so that we are made right with God. We do not study the word of God, attend Sunday worship or any religious activity to achieve righteousness with God. It is because of the completed work of Christ Jesus, that we do these things. In other words we do righteous works because we are already made righteous through Christ Jesus.

How can a corrupted thing cleanse itself from corruption, because all that a corrupted thing can do is corruption, no matter how good outwardly what it does may look. Because we are born sinners there is no law or anything we can do that can make us right before God. That is why Paul could only boast in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh. Paul had all the reasons to place confidence in the flesh, he was circumcised in accordance with the law, a purest of them Hebrew, a man who was zealous to persecute the church and as for righteousness based on the law, he was faultless [4-6]. Paul placed great value or worth in his human capabilities to achieve righteousness or to be a good person. He had all the reasons to boast in the flesh, he had invested so much in what he could do and it seemed he was good at what he did to be righteous. For he says, as for righteousness based on the law, faultless. However let us look at verse 7-8a, "But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things..." Paul says he had gained so much from his past life, meaning that he gained so much from his performance based religion. However, he now says, for the sake of Christ Jesus, all those gains or benefits of living the way he did, he considers them a loss. Take note that, they have not automatically become a loss,

Paul had to consider them a loss, and he is able to consider them a loss for the sake of Christ Jesus. In comparison to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, he considers everything a loss.

What did Paul know about Christ Jesus? As Paul said, he was zealous for prosecuting the church, regarding righteousness through law, faultless. So that means he knew about the gospel of Jesus that is why he persecuted the church for he regarded the gospel as heresy. However, one day he met Jesus Christ personally and his life never remained the same again, Jesus became his Lord. There was a big difference between knowing about Jesus and knowing Jesus through meeting him personally. That is why he says, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus **my Lord**. When he met Jesus personally, Jesus became more worthy than his zeal to save his life through a righteousness of his own. He found in Jesus something more valuable than anything in this world. All his achievement for self worth and meaning became a loss, because in Jesus he found the complete work of salvation for his life. When he met Jesus there was an extraordinary exchange of value system.

In verse 8b says, **“...I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ.”** Paul considered all his righteous works based on the law as rubbish in order that he may gain Christ. This does not mean his achievements for a righteousness of his own was rubbish by themselves. Rather, in order to gain Christ Jesus he intentionally considers them rubbish. Because in comparison to the **surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus** who grants righteousness through faith, his own righteousness was not only useless but was rubbish. Now here is a challenge for you and me, can we consider our achievements to be right before God as rubbish? In order to gain Christ Jesus Paul did.

Let us look again at verse 9, to see what we gain in Christ and what is necessary to know Christ Jesus, “...and be found in him, 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.” We gain righteousness from God on the basis of faith alone. And the basis of knowing Christ Jesus is through faith. It is through faith that makes Christ and what he has done for us real to us personally. Without faith we will only have head knowledge of Christ Jesus. However, with faith, Jesus can be known and becomes real to us.

Let us all look at verse 10, Paul says “I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death...” Paul had a strong desire that runs deep in his heart to know Christ Jesus. However, what does this mean practically? We have already established faith is the mechanism by which we can know Jesus Christ. Now Paul is expressing a desire, a want to know Christ Jesus, which means it will be done through faith. And we already know that Paul has faith in Christ Jesus, so now what does he mean practically that he wants to know Christ Jesus? Let's look once again at verse 10, he says, I want to know Christ, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death. **The end goal of knowing Christ is to become like him in his death.** Meaning that his desire is not simply to observe Jesus, study his word and pray. He wants to know Christ Jesus in order that he can become like Jesus Christ in his death. And in order for this to be possible, in order to become like someone, it is obvious that you will need to go through what they have been through. Paul wanted to know Christ through participating in what Christ participated in. In this way he will be able to become like Christ. And in becoming like Christ Jesus he will know the power of his resurrection. Because to know Christ Jesus is to know the power of his resurrection, these two are interchangeable. Again this is not about information or something you study for, Paul is showing us here that to know the power of his resurrection requires Christ power working in his own life, it is a life that needs to be lived in Christ. Though we may all like power and would too desire to know the power of his resurrection, **that power can mainly be known through participating in Christ sufferings.**

Jesus was a man of suffering, Isaiah 53:3 says, “He was despised and rejected by mankind, **a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.** Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.” Jesus suffered rejection, loneliness, abandonment, misunderstanding, humiliation and all kinds of strain on his earthly and spiritual life. Ultimately, it was through his suffering and death that our sins forgiven. So when Paul says he wants to know Christ Jesus through participating in his sufferings, it does not mean he is after hurting himself or recklessly place himself in danger. Rather Paul wanted to imitate the life of Christ Jesus of mission, embracing the sufferings that are inevitable because Jesus was a man of suffering.

However, either way everybody suffers. As long as you are breathing through those nostrils, we cannot avoid suffering. It is like suffering is guaranteed whether you are a Christian or not. In our lives, we have experienced and will experience a wide range of sufferings. Some are visible to others and some are internal, nicely hidden not easily expressed. For those in Christ Jesus, the good news is that in the gospel, we can decide to know Jesus through our sufferings. Jesus sufferings give meaning to our sufferings and make them all work for a good purpose. Paul has shown us that by faith, we can overcome our sufferings and take up our cross daily. Then our sufferings become a participation in the sufferings of Christ Jesus himself. In this way, we gain a special spiritual connection with Jesus. We know him personally because we have partially gone through what he went through. This will allow us to see from Christ perspective giving us the power to overcome our pettiness and self-centeredness. Then as Jesus resurrection power appeared after his suffering and death, the resurrection power of Jesus can spring up in us as new life after we experience death to our old self [11].

I do not even come close to Christ sufferings, however I remember the days with my first bible student who lived at one of the University residences in park-town. We would have our bible studies at his room at his residence. I lived in Melville with shd Jacob's family and I think shared a room with Khomo. In those days I did not have a car of my own and so shds Rebekha would borrow me her green Mazda for my bible study session in park town. A number of times we would make appointments for bible study, I would cancel my other commitments or things I wanted to do so I may the bible study with him. When I arrived at his door, I would knock and find that he was not around. I would try calling him on his phone to receive no response. I would try wait some time, knock and call again without any success. This used to make me so angry and annoyed because I had changed my plans to cater for him yet seemed he did not care. Though I tried to inform him to at least let me if we could not meet that day he would still somehow not do it consistently. However, same time I could not lesh out like that to him because I did not want him to quit bible studies. However, one day when the same thing happened again something dawn upon me, I think it was the holy spirit, I was realizing that I am actually like him before Jesus. How many times I heard Jesus words and still I too would say yes but still fail many times to obey his teachings and commandments. How many years Jesus had been seeking after me and I would not meet him personally. I realized that I was no different from my bible student before Jesus. This help me appreciate the love of Jesus for me more deeply than before, because I could now understand better what his love for me meant, that indeed his love endures forever. This experience helped me know Jesus a little better than before and then struggle to serve bible studies with the faith of Jesus who laid down his life for me. I pray that I may see my struggles and suffering as a participation in Christs sufferings and grow into a new kind of faith.

In verse 12, Paul admits that he had not yet arrived at his goal, however did not allow that discourage him. But rather he pressed on to take hold of that for which Jesus took hold of him. Paul could have confidence that he would not fail to attain that goal because the high goal of knowing Jesus was something that Jesus himself had taken hold of Paul for. In other words it was something that Jesus wanted and held on to for Paul. To sustain his efforts in knowing Jesus, Paul did not also allow his past get in his way, he forgot what was behind him and strained towards what was ahead [13-14]. He did not allow his past failures chain him down. In the gospel this is possible for all our past sins are washed away by God's grace.

Perhaps some of us here are in the middle of what looks and feels like a spell of strain of fruitlessness. Though we have the eagerness to know Christ Jesus and his power in our lives, it seems as though nothing is changing much. What can we do? I believe the goal of knowing Christ Jesus never gets old. We should never think we need to look behind and say, I just need the kind of faith I used to have. That is simply same as asking to be stuck. The goal of knowing Jesus does not change, God wants to stretch us into a new kind of faith for a new phase of life.

In conclusion, we need to re-ignite our spiritual desire based on this very goal, **I want to know Christ Jesus**. Then like Paul admit that we have not yet taken hold it and search again for a new spiritual perspective that will enable us to exercise faith in a new way. With God's help, we can start to grow again and other things begin to change. Whatever sufferings we may be going through, Jesus is with us taking hold of us so that we attain the goal of becoming what Jesus has purposed us to be. One day by God's power, Jesus will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body [21], Amen.