

Philippians 3:1-11

How many of you have seen the film Knight and Day?

Cameron Diaz plays a lady called June who accidentally gets caught up with the secret agent played by Tom Cruise.

At one point in the film Diaz is in very great danger, well actually she in danger most of the time. But at this point she decided that she doesn't want to follow the agent anymore. Listen to what Tom Cruise says

Your life expectancy is like here. [hands low down]

With me it's here [hands up high]

Without me

With me

Without me

In other words, Tom Cruise told Cameron Diaz that her life would be a lot safer if she was with him. It would certainly be packed full of adventure and excitement.

In the letter to the Philippians, Paul is saying that life with Jesus is a life of great fullness, of great joy.

Life with Jesus – up here

Life without – wasted, a wasted life, nothing.

With Jesus

Without Jesus

And Paul warns the church in Philippi, just like he warns us today, that nothing must get in the way of knowing Jesus. We must not get side-tracked by anything, but instead treasure Christ above all else.

With Jesus

Without Jesus

So here we see Paul warning the Philippian church again and again about legalism, He says – it's no trouble to write the same thing to you again and again and it's a safeguard for you.

Sometimes we need to hear things over and over again until we really get it!

How many times have we read and reread a passage and then, all of a sudden, we have a light bulb moment!?! – Oh, I get it now, so that's what it means!

At our homegroup, the week before last, we were looking at some familiar scripture, and people were reading the passage in different translations and chatting things through and boy we were all learning new things about Jesus, even though all us had read the passage time and time again.

So, Paul is hoping to make the people in the church in Philippi really understand what legalism is and why it is so important to avoid it ...and he uses some pretty strong language to get their attention!

So, what is legalism?

The definition of Legalism is 'working to earn God's favour'. Hmm, working to earn God's favour – none of us do that do we? Of course not! Or do we?

For Paul, the problem he was dealing with, the problem he needed to address was the false teaching, the legalistic teaching by a certain sector in the church. They were known as the Judaisers, a group of Jewish Christians, don't miss this – these were Christians, Christians who had converted from Judaism. Some of these Christians, insisted that any new gentile believers had to be circumcised and follow a whole bunch of rules and regulations and ritual practices, before they could become a Christian.

Pauls message throughout his letters, was that receiving the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, is through faith alone and not by works...

Ephesians 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works

In verse 9 of Phil 3, Paul writes '*not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ*' – and he says it again - *the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.*

We all know this, you know this, - we know it up here [point to head], we hear it week in, week out – we cannot earn our salvation. But Paul is saying you need to hear it again! Because you don't understand, you haven't got it yet.

Here in Philippi, Paul was warning people to steer clear of anyone who tried to suggest the gospel needed things added to it.

He calls the Judaisers dogs! Just note the irony here....Dogs was the name the Jews called the gentiles. Now Paul was calling the Jewish Christians, dogs. Dogs, evil doers, mutilators of the flesh.

I wonder how Paul's letter was received? It would have been read out to the gathered church. Can you imagine if you were there? Maybe if you were a gentile, sitting next to a Jewish convert as this letter was read out. Perhaps you'd be thinking... 'Hey, Paul doesn't think much of you, does he?!'

And what about if you were a Jewish convert or even a Judaiser? This guy Paul is going too far, he's outrageous! Surely God gave us the law. 'What is he on about?!'

I think it would have been a pretty uncomfortable meeting, to say the least... Maybe today, we would approach it in a different way. Maybe we'd try and encourage in a more conciliatory way. You'd start with the positive, thank them for the good things. Then explain you see things in a different way and wonder what they think. It's called motivational intervention.

No, not Paul – Paul uses the 'speak truth in love approach', don't you love that phrase... He says, watch out for the dogs, the evil doers the mutilators of the flesh. Harsh words.

And he reminds them that actually Christians are 'the circumcision'. What does that mean by that? That all Christians, whether Jew or gentile, have been circumcised – not of the flesh but of the heart.

The promise of a new covenant – foretold in Jeremiah.

'The days are coming,' declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant'...I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.'

You can tell a Christian by their heart.

It's no longer about an outward sign but it is about what is happening on the inside. And he says don't put any confidence in outward signs, be it circumcision or any other outward appearance. Put no confidence in legalistic works, whatsoever.

Then Paul almost goads them, saying if anyone thinks they have anything to match what I've got, what I've done to earn favour with God – to be

righteousness before God, I challenge them. And he lists things a whole set of things, things he'd both received and things he'd achieved in his former life.

And he says in verse 7 All of these things I consider loss for the sake of Christ. Wasted!

Life with Christ

Life without Christ – wasted.

So, here we go - in verse 5 and 6 Paul lists the treasures of a wasted life.

1. The first sign of a wasted life is **Family heritage & social status** – Paul was from the tribe of Benjamin. Benjamin was the son of the favoured Rachel, not the ugly Leah or any other concubine of Jacobs. The tribe of Benjamin owned the land around Jerusalem including the Temple. They were the best of the best. They stayed faithful to David. They were the tribe that gave Israel their first king. And the first king of Israel was called...Saul (which was Paul's name before he converted) You don't get any more Hebrew than this. He was Hebrew of Hebrews.
Paul was from a good family background and excellent social status.
2. The second sign of a wasted life is **Biblical knowledge** - 'in regards to the law, a Pharisee.' We think of Pharisees as hypocrites now and maybe many were, but they knew their bibles. They learnt the Torah – the first 5 books of the bible, they loved God's word, poured over it, they taught it, they obeyed it to the letter. Extemporary Biblical knowledge.
3. The third area is **Religious activity** – Paul was zealous for God, he not only studied the law, he acted on it. He persecuted those, who he saw, were trying to corrupt the law. He was intent on ensuring the Jewish ways were not watered down or changed. His life calling was to minister to the Jewish faith.
4. Finally – Paul lived a **moral life** – he followed the rules, he followed God's commandments to the very letter. He did all the right things. Paul knew all the books of the Law, and obeyed them. He did right in the sight of God and in the sight of the Jews, God's chosen people.

Let's just look at the list. Coming from a good background is not a bad thing. Reading the bible, that's a good thing. Obeying the rules and leading a good, moral life – these are all good things.

It wasn't bad things that were keeping Paul from Jesus, it was good things.

It's telling us that it's possible to love your family, have a good standing and reputation in the community, read and know your bible, go to church and have an active role within it, be a good and moral person and still come to the end of your life and find it was all wasted.

That's quite shocking, to think that all the good stuff we do in life may not count! Paul is saying that all this is loss, all this is wasted life,compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

Verse 8 he says I consider everything loss. I consider them garbage. For those of you who have heard anyone preach on this passage before will know that most English translations tone down Paul's language for the sake of our sensibilities, but Paul chose his words carefully in order to make us sit up and listen. The word garbage, which is bad enough, is better translated as dog poo, dung, excrement.

You see, Paul was trying to make a point. Legalism really is that serious. Legalism, even doing good things is nothing, it's rubbish, one big loss, zero, zilch... compared to knowing Christ.

The only treasure that counts in this life, in this life is Christ.

Jesus said a lot about treasure, here's one from Matthew 6:20
But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal;

My helping others now and when I was a doctor, my praying with people, my theological training, my giving up a comfortable home in Orpington to come here and help take services – it's all rubbish – it's nothing....

Earthly treasure is garbage – and we know what that word means...
What is the true treasure? The only treasure that counts is Jesus.
Paul says this over and over again, in verse 10. I want to know Christ, I want to know his power, I want to become like Christ.
Christ is far greater than all the good things put together

Do I know Christ? Do you know Christ?

Is he the treasure chest of joy around which your life revolves?

The gospel makes us joyful because it tells us we have nothing at all to prove to God – he does it all and he gets all the glory.

Legalism is the exact opposite of the Gospel. It tells us to strive for God's approval. It tells us we must, we must read the bible, we must pray, we must serve in the church. If we do these to strive for God's approval then it makes us miserable, because none of us has got what it takes to score any points on God's righteous scorecard.

Are you filled with joy at this time?

At the beginning of our passage Paul reminds us in v1 that rejoicing in God is the safeguard against legalism and one of the first signs we have fallen into legalism is that we lose our joy. We've had many a sermon on joy this year – Joy is not the same as feeling happy – it's a deep-seated confidence, a deep-seated love in the Lord. How do we find this joy? – by spending time with him, seeking him with all our heart. In whichever way is right for you.

As I close, let me bring you a challenge, the same challenge that Paul brought to the Philippians nearly 2000 years ago. Do you know Jesus? Have you found Him in such a way that he is worth losing everything for?

Let's take a look at verse 8 again – *'I consider everything loss, because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for who's sake I have lost **all** things.'*

Job lost everything, things, possessions, people, his children, his health and yet – Job knew Jesus. It says in Job 19:25-27

I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth.

And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God;

I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another.

How my heart yearns within me!

We saw in Philippians 2 the Epaphroditus risked everything, almost to death to help Paul because he knew the surpassing greatness of Jesus.

Even when we lose good things, our health, our loved ones.

Even when there is pain, deep and real pain, pain akin to that Jesus knew as he knelt in the Garden of Gethsemane and wept, pain Jesus knew on the cross as he died in agony.

Even if we lose everything, know that your redeemer lives and knowing him brings joy beyond anything we are experiencing right now.

We never lose our joy. As long as we have Christ, we have everything we need. Let nothing get in the way of having Jesus as the treasure chest of joy around which our lives revolve.

What do you need to give up this Lent in order to know Christ more?

To know his treasure chest of joy

To know his surpassing greatness

To know his peace, his power, his purpose

To know his love, his compassion

I could go on....to know more than you could ever ask or imagine.

With Jesus

Without Jesus

Your choice.