

# TO LIVE IS CHRIST

## A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

### *Rejoice in the Lord – Not Circumstances!*

***Habakkuk 3:18 (ESV)*** <sup>18</sup> *yet I will rejoice in the LORD;  
I will take joy in the God of my salvation.*

The German philosopher, Frederick Nietzsche, an enemy of Christianity said scornfully concerning Christians of his day: “I would believe in their salvation if they looked a little more like people who had been saved.”

David Legge, says, ”Now, we don't want to side with the enemies of Christianity, but I think he has a valid point: there are times when Christians betray the true joy that we ought to have in our salvation, with all the blessings that we have in the Lord Jesus Christ. So much of the time we as Christians can be the same in our emotions as those who are not Christians.”

Today’s scripture reveals that joy is commanded of the believer. If there's a secret to having joy in our lives, it is learning to rejoice in the Lord.”

***Read Philippians 3:1-3 (ESV)*** <sup>1</sup> *Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.* <sup>2</sup> *Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh.* <sup>3</sup> *For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—*

Chapter 3 begins with Paul saying, *Finally*. In reality, Paul had just come to the mid-point in his letter. It still happens in churches today. The pastor says, ‘in conclusion’ but it may be 30 minutes later before he finishes the sermon. It appears that Paul’s intent of saying ‘*finally*’ was that telling the Philippians to *Rejoice in the Lord* was to be his final message – his last word to them. Later in the letter he will write in ***Philippians 4:4 (ESV)*** <sup>4</sup> *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.* Why do we repeat things? To make sure that we get our point across and Paul wanted the Philippians to know that he had no problem telling them more than once to rejoice!

After reminding the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord, Paul moved on to warning them to watch out for the dogs and evildoers – which were one and the same. Animal lovers should not ‘get up in arms’ for Paul contrasting evil men to dogs since it is a legitimate contrast – not to household pets of today but to dirty scavenger dogs of biblical times. The ‘dog reference’ was actually a reference to humans.

If you were not a Jew you were a Gentile. Wiersbe explains, “The orthodox Jew would call the Gentile a ‘dog,’ but here Paul calls orthodox Jews ‘dogs’! Paul is not just using names; he is comparing these false teachers to the dirty scavengers so contemptible to decent people. Like those dogs, these Judaizers snapped at Paul’s heels and followed him from place to place ‘barking’ their false doctrines. They were troublemakers and carriers of dangerous infection.”

Many early Jewish converts to Christianity because Judaizers – that is those who tried to force believers from non-Jewish backgrounds to adopt Jewish customs as a condition to meet for salvation. After Paul encountered Jesus on the Damascus Road, he began sharing the Good News of Jesus to the Gentile world. You could say that Paul had taken his message to the dogs! But the real dogs who opposed the gospel of Christ were roaming in packs doing what they did best – working to tear down others.

We are to refute a lying dog. But at the same time remember this. Do not sit in judgment of another person or judge what another person should or should not do. It is the Holy Spirit who convicts of sin (**John 16:8**) not us.

Judaizers believed that the first step to becoming a Christian for the Gentile was for the Gentile to be circumcised. The Judaizers insisted that circumcision was essential to salvation. The word translated circumcision literally means mutilation. Paul had come to realize that circumcision by itself was nothing more than mutilation.

Circumcision, baptism, the Lord's Supper, tithing, or any other religious practice cannot save a person from our sins. Only faith in Jesus Christ can do that. Wiersbe gives this example, “A lady was arguing with her pastor about this matter of faith and works. “I think that getting to heaven is like rowing a boat,” she said. “One oar is faith, and the other is works. If you use both, you get there. If you use only one, you go around in circles.” “There is only one thing wrong with your illustration,” replied the pastor. “Nobody is going to heaven *in a row boat!*” There is only one ‘good work’ that takes the sinner to heaven: the finished work of Christ on the cross.” (**Hebrews 10:11-14, John 17:1-4**) Beware! Do not put confidence in the flesh.

### Paul Examines His Own Life

**Read Philippians 3:4- 8 (ESV)**<sup>4</sup> *though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more:*<sup>5</sup> *circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee;*<sup>6</sup> *as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.*<sup>7</sup> *But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.*<sup>8</sup> *Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ*<sup>9</sup> *and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—*

Paul had learned by experience how unprofitable the flesh was. Yet, it is natural to wonder why Paul would be so bold to say: *If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more.* His letter was to Gentiles. Paul was born within the circle of God’s covenant with Abraham. He was not a proselyte - meaning he was not merely a convert to the Jewish faith. Paul was of the stock of Israel. For generations his family had belonged to the covenant people. He was descended not from a bondwoman, but from the favorite wife of Jacob. Another highlight of Paul’s heritage was that he came from the tribe of Benjamin. Benjamin and Joseph were Jacob's favorite sons. Israel's first king came from Benjamin, and this little tribe had been faithful to David during the rebellion under Absalom. Paul’s human blood line was ‘mighty fine’.

Essentially, Paul is telling the Philippians that he “came with” a very credentialed résumé! As Christians today, if we are not careful, we can take our own “Christian résumé and “tweak” it into something similar to Paul’s traditional Jewish résumé. For example, Paul said he was circumcised on the eighth day. A traditional Christian résumé might say ‘baptized as an infant’. Paul mentioned he was from the tribe of Benjamin. We might mention a parent or grandparent who was a preacher.

From Paul’s recitation of his Jewish résumé, we realize that he could have ‘run with the big boys’ – meaning the Judaizers had nothing on him when it came to religious qualifications. But, Paul counted his past achievements worthless. Paul knew when it came to comparing résumés his was just trash alongside Jesus.

After Paul encountered Jesus, he lost the thrill of his own righteousness. In fact, encountering the righteousness of Jesus made Paul truly understand the words of the prophet Isaiah in **Isaiah 64:6 (ESV)** <sup>6</sup> *We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.*

Concerning righteousness, Wiersbe explains that righteousness was the great goal of Paul’s life when he was a Pharisee, but it was a self-righteousness, a works righteousness, that he never could attain. But when Paul trusted Christ, he lost his own self-righteousness and gained the righteousness of Christ.

**Read 2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)** <sup>21</sup> *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

When we accept Christ, we are covered with the righteousness of God. That is something to be joyful over – no matter what our physical circumstances at the present may be. **Proverbs 10:28 (ESV)** <sup>28</sup> *The hope of the righteous brings joy, but the expectation of the wicked will perish.*

**Read Philippians 3:10-11 (ESV)** <sup>10</sup> *that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,* <sup>11</sup> *that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*

Every believer then and now can rejoice in Paul’s words: *I may know him and the power of his resurrection.* Consider the significance of knowing the power of the resurrection.

Knowledge gives us confidence. When I am working on the computer, I may not know whether or not some function can be performed for certain until I do it for the first time. Then, later when I attempt to repeat the same function, even if I have forgotten the specifics of the process, I am confident that I can perform that function again because “I have already done it once.” Our rising from the dead is like that. We can be confident that we will be resurrected from the dead because Jesus has already risen from the dead. His resurrection is proof that we too can rise again if we make the right response to the Living Lord. Paul explained it this way in **1 Corinthians 15:20 (ESV)** <sup>20</sup> *But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*

**To live in the power of Christ's resurrection is to become more and more 'dead' to the ways of this world and the lusts of the flesh. It involves becoming more like Christ. – Ron Mattoon**

The same power that raised the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, works in the believer to provide daily victory over sin. Paul pursued knowing more of Christ's power.

When Paul wrote the words *any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead*, he was not doubtful of his own future resurrection. He was unsure of the way he would meet God. Paul like Christians today was anticipating the imminent return of Christ. I am sure Paul had thoughts of being caught away from prison by the Lord in the air just as we wish to be; however, Paul understood that he might have to pass through the valley of the shadow of death to meet Jesus. Paul was secure in the knowledge that he would receive life after death because he had encountered the Risen Lord.

During the preparation of the lesson this week, I had a long conversation with my brother in Germany who recently lost his wife. He is a Korean War and Viet Nam veteran and during his time of service he experienced many horrific circumstances – and yes, things that he regrets. Even though he is a man of the world he views the world through the Light of Christ. He has truly experienced the forgiveness of God. At 87 years old, he still speaks of how Mother read the Bible through to him on more than one occasion when he was a child. He clings to Christ.

As I think on these things, my thoughts turn to a description written by Charles Martin in his book, *What If It Were True?* In a section entitled *Party's Over*, Martin writes of the power of the resurrection. Keep in mind that what Martin writes is meant to draw an intense picture not to be particularly scriptural or theological – just Martin's way of acknowledging the power of the resurrection:

By the time they took down the body, Jesus' spirit was long gone. The moment He died here His work wasn't over. Jesus' spirit climbed off the cross and – cloaked in the sin of all mankind, starting with mine and yours – He descended into hell where there was a party underway, an orgy, unlike any seen in the history of this world or any other... The only one not enjoying the party is satan. he knows the Word; he was there when God spoke it...Jesus walks down the road to satan's court... It is here – in the pit of hell – that Jesus strips off the sin of humanity that has masked Him. Party's over... satan turns...cowering. he's defeated. Powerless. Dethroned. Destroyed.. Disarmed...Exposed as a punk whose kingdom is crumbling all around. Jesus the Word made flesh...says, "Stop!" and lucifer can't move, he knows what Jesus came to get. Jesus lifts the keys dangling on satan's belt. "I'll take those." Then he places His heel on satan's neck and speaks for all eternity to hear... The Lion of Judah roars, "All debts are paid. All past, present, and future claims are cancelled. ..Sin no longer has dominion. My children are no longer under law but under grace!"

And that is why we can rejoice in the Lord – today and everyday – past, present, and future circumstances do not matter. God's children have great reason to rejoice in the power of the resurrection! Jesus is Lord of all! Our sins are forgiven!