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**Who Are You?**  
**Philippians 3:1-11**

As we continue this sermon series through Paul's letter to the Philippians, I encourage you to **sit back and hear** chapter 3 read aloud to you, much as it might have been read aloud, to the worshipping community in Philippi.

*Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is not troublesome to me, and for you it is a safeguard.*

**2** *Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh!*

**3** *For it is we who are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh—*

**4** *even though I, too, have reason for confidence in the flesh. If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more:*

**5** *circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee;*

**6** *as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.*

**7** *Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ.*

**8** *More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ*

**9** *and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith.*

**10** *I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death,*

**11** *if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*

Let us pray...

**Who are you?**

How do you answer when people ask you that?

What do you say when asked to **describe** yourself?

What about when asked to create a **social profile**?

I've been reading all week about **how famous people describe** themselves, about where they find their **identity**.

And one thing kept coming up.

**They ALL have fears, and doubts, and anxieties**—every single one.

It was interesting because **Whitney Houston**, perhaps one of the greatest female singers of all time, was remembered by Kevin Costner for her doubts, and her anxiety ... She didn't feel good enough. This incredibly successful, confident and courageous woman felt anxious and afraid. Adapted from John Bishop, *God Distorted* (Multnomah, 2013), pp. 87-88

I was reading about how **Dustin Hoffman**, a double Oscar-winner, and a screen legend, still to this day wonders every time he has a new role, is this it for me? Will it all be over after this? Will I ever be asked to act again?

Tim Robey, "Dustin Hoffman: I worry I'll never work again," The Telegraph (7-9-15)

In a 2016 interview in The New York Times, award-winning actor **Ben Affleck** has realized "that for all of his Hollywood success, some part of him will always feel like a relentless striver who must prove, through his work, that he has a right to be there." Affleck put it this way: That [relentless striving] never goes away. ...it's like a neurosis that drives me to work every day.

David Itzkoff, "Ben Affleck's Broken Batman," The New York Times (3-14-16)

A couple years ago Sports Illustrated named **Rhonda Rousey** the "world's most dominant athlete." She is the first US woman ever to win an Olympic medal in Judo; one of the youngest women to ever qualify for the Olympics, at age 14; consistently one of the top three ranked judo champions in the world before transitioning into mixed martial arts, where she quickly dominated and became a world champion; going into November of 2015, she was 12-0 as an MMA fighter...And then, in November 2015, she lost—badly. In an interview shortly after that devastating loss she said, "I was literally sitting there and thinking about killing myself and at that exact second I'm like, 'I'm nothing. What do I do anymore? And, no one [cares] about me anymore without this.'"

Her **whole identity was inseparable** from her image as the "most dominant athlete in the world." Brent L. White, "Sermon 3-6-16: Believing the Word," Rev. Brent L. White blog (3-11-16)

But this phenomenon of basing our identity on what we do,  
or what we look like,  
it's not just for the rich and famous.  
It's something that affects **all of us**, even the **young** people among us.

A new study published in the UK reveals that **children are struggling** with low self-esteem, loneliness, and deep unhappiness.

A free, private counseling hotline for children and teens up to the age of 19, said it was contacted 35,244 times in the last year by children struggling with how to be happy.

In the organization's 30-year history, general unhappiness is only a recent trend.

Previously, self-harm and eating disorders were among the most common causes for children to contact the helpline.

But today, unhappiness is strongly connected with the drive to keep up one's image on social media.

One expert noted, "It is clear that the pressure to keep up with friends and have the perfect life online is adding to the sadness many young people feel on a daily basis." Psychologists warn against this kind of social comparison, where kids base their worth on how they think they stack up against other people's online profile. For example, the magazine Elle explored a trend of young school girls creating private "real" accounts of themselves as a way of expressing their true identity separately from the one they portray online.

In a recent survey conducted by the Girl Scouts, nearly 74 percent of girls agreed that other girls tried to make themselves look "cooler than they are" on social networking sites. Matthew Hussey Tweet, "[The Web is quietly creating a generation of miserable kids.](#)" The Next Web

**Who are you?**

How do you **define yourself**?

And how do you define yourself, **online**—in your profile?

In your pictures?

In your posts?

Are you defined primarily by your **job**?

Are you defined primarily by your **accomplishments**?

What about by your **family**—kids, and grandkids, or their accomplishments?

We all have these ways of describing ourselves,

We feel **pressure** in many cases to describe ourselves well, especially online, right?

And what we say tells a lot about **what we think is important**, doesn't it?

So what do we say when trying to define ourselves,

**What do you say?**

And is it what you really **believe**? deep down in your heart?

The writer of this letter, the apostle **Paul**

had **every reason to be proud** of himself,

of who he was, and what he had accomplished....

*If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more:*

*5 circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee;*

*6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.*

Paul was born into the **Jewish** faith,

he was circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day after his birth.

And, he was a Jew from the tribe of **Benjamin**.

He also accomplished amazing things in his faith, he became a **Pharisee**.

Now, we give Pharisees a bad rap, but really they were **Pastors**.

They were people who cared about God and God's law.

They encouraged others to follow the law,

and to love the Torah and the Jewish faith,

much like I encourage all of us to love and follow Christ.

His **intense studies and strong faith** made him a Pharisee,

so he had reason to be proud.

Next he says that he was very **zealous**,

so much so that he **persecuted** the church.

This sounds terrible, but to some it would have been a good thing. In other words, he **stood for Judaism**, in its purest form. He chastised people who strayed from the faith, especially those who were following this man Jesus, people who were following what they called "The Way", (because it wasn't known as the church for many years.)

Overall Paul says that he was **a righteous and blameless** man. Now we might not say we are never blameless, but we could agree that Paul was a righteous man. He tried his very best to love and follow God's law, and to live an upright life.

So **what's wrong** with all that?  
Isn't that what **we want** for our lives as well?  
To love and follow God?  
To live good lives?

But Paul says, he regarded it all as **loss**,  
*Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ.*  
**8** *More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish.*

The word there for rubbish in Greek actually means **dung**, so he thought it was complete manure, or garbage!  
Talk about strong words!

Why? Why would he say this?  
He says *I have come to regard as loss because of Christ.*  
Then he says, *For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ, and be found in him.*

**What does that mean?**  
What do you think of when you hear that?  
To **gain Christ, to be found in Him?**

I wonder if what he's saying is that **all our striving**,  
Trying to make ourselves look good **isn't a top priority!**  
I wonder if he's saying that our striving to have the right **job**,  
The perfect **family**, the beautiful **home**,  
The top **accomplishments**,  
Is ultimately pointing us in the **wrong direction?**

I wonder if he's trying to remind us of **something more important**,  
Something eternal, and everlasting.

What would **Paul say if he were here**,  
 And he read our Facebook **profiles and posts**?  
 What would he say if we **rattled off a list** of our accomplishments and our background and  
 our family—what do you think he would he say?

Would he say, friend, **you are missing the point**?  
 Isn't there **something** more important than all of that?  
 Isn't there **SOMEONE** more important in your life?

Because for Paul—that something is **faith**,  
 and that someone is **Jesus Christ**.

**What if instead of trying to prove** our worth to the **world**,  
 We stopped all that?  
 And what if instead of trying to prove ourselves to **God**,  
 and earn God's help and grace,  
 we were **just trying to really know Jesus Christ**?

Paul says that all his accomplishments,  
 his profile if you will, is **garbage**!  
 Why?

*in order that I may gain Christ **9** and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own  
 that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from  
 God based on faith.*

**What does he mean?**

Keep listening to verses 10 and 11:

*I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by  
 becoming like him in his death,*

**11** *if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*

Paul is saying something very simple.

**Life is all about one thing—knowing Jesus Christ.**

That's it.

That's the **bottom line**.

That is our **highest goal**, our most important relationship,  
 our only chance of knowing the power of his resurrection,  
 and eternal life for each one of us!

Now some of us may wonder---

**Does Jesus not care** about what we have **accomplished**?

Does Jesus not care about who we **are**?

Isn't it important to be good, follow God's law,  
 strive to do what is right?

I think *Jesus does care*, and those things are important, but they *should not be the priority*. And more importantly, they *can't get us to God!* We *can't earn* God's love and attention by doing what's right. That was the *old way* of salvation, that's what Paul grew up with, following the over 600 Jewish laws, so that he would be saved.

But we can't earn our salvation. Remember what he said in verse 9: *not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith.*

So what is the path to salvation?  
What is the *way to be right with God?*  
And how do we get to *know Jesus Christ and the power* of his resurrection?

**I think Paul would say it in one word: Faith.**

You know 500 years ago this fall, in 1517, an Augustinian monk named *Martin Luther* nailed 95 theses on the door of the Wittenberg church in Germany.

It was a document that protested the practices of the Catholic church, especially the pope's sale of penance, or indulgences. In other words, people could pay and be forgiven.

He went on to be excommunicated in 1521, but his *translation* of the Bible into German so that ordinary people could read it, and his belief in the '*priesthood of all believers*' led to Lutheranism becoming the state religion throughout Germany, Scandinavia, and the Baltics by the end of the Reformation.

His courageous act spurred *other Reformers in Switzerland* like Zwingli and John Calvin, the Father of Presbyterianism, and the movement grew from there.

What we know as the Reformation is the movement where we get many of our foundational church ideas today, like the *sovereignty* of God, saved by *grace through faith* alone, and the central role of the *Bible* for all Christians.

Before the Reformation ordinary people were not allowed to read the scriptures for themselves, and salvation was effected by religious rites and rituals, indulgences, and always through an intermediary, the priest.

Reformers believed in the foundation of the *Bible*, and the *priesthood* of all believers, based on 1 Peter 2:5—

which is where we get our statement on the back of your bulletin, where it says that ***each one of us is a minister!***

The ***Roman Catholic church did respond*** with many important reforms, like the Jesuit order of priests, and mystics like Teresa of Avila, who brought renewal within the church, but for many the formation of Reformed denominations brought life and a new beginning for Christians.  
<http://www.history.com/topics/reformation>

Today we celebrate the ***500th anniversary*** because Luther and the other Reformers made ***FAITH*** the foundation of our Christian faith, Salvation is not about what we ***do***, but what we ***believe***. It is not based on our ***works***, but on God's ***grace alone***, which we receive through ***faith***. We ***cannot earn*** our place with God, and the apostle Paul wanted us to know that, including in this letter we have to the Philippian church.

### ***Faith***

That's something apart from pride, right?

It's from the ***heart***.

While all our accomplishments, our families, our jobs, our sources of pride are ***exterior*** to us---faith is on the ***inside***, isn't it?

And Paul says, much like Jesus said, that's what matters—***our hearts***. What's really important is where we place our faith--- is it in ***who we are and what*** we have accomplished, or is it in ***Jesus Christ?***

### ***What will it be for us?***

Will we have FAITH in Jesus Christ?

Do we want to know ***what can make us look better*** to other people, or even to God, or do we want to ***know Jesus, and the power*** of his resurrection?

I saw Elizabeth Warne yesterday, and talk about faith! She's ready for the next part of her journey, she's even ready to go meet Jesus. She's going to make a garden there, and we'll have a special place in it. She told me to tell you how much she loves you, and how when you hear that she has gone on...to raise your hand and say hallelujah! She has that FAITH in Jesus!

Friends, I pray that we have such Faith.

It ***doesn't matter*** who we are or where we've come from.

It doesn't matter where we work, what we own,  
what we look like, or who our friends are.....  
all that matters is this ***one thing***.  
This ***one person*** in our lives.  
The ***only person*** who can actually bring us life.

How will we ***identify ourselves?***  
What about as ***children of God, followers of Jesus Christ?***

That's ***Good News*** from the Gospel!  
And all God's people said, ***Amen***.