

PHILIPPIANS 3
UNION GROVE BAPTIST CHURCH
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Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord (Phil. 3:1).

We hear that phrase, “rejoice in the Lord” all the time but what does it mean? Usually, we hear it when the world is falling in on us and some pious person tells us to “rejoice in the Lord.” As if we haven’t heard that before or seen it on bumper stickers or on a coffee cup at Lifeway Book Stores.

But, really that phrase, “rejoice in the Lord,” only appears three times in scripture. Here, again in Philippians 4:4 and again in 4:10. Only in this Book; and only in these three places do we find it, but I think all us who have been around the Christian faith for a while have heard it.

So why is it here, and why does Paul say it now? Looking back on Chapters 1 and 2 of Philippians, as Pastor Faber has been teaching, the phrase to rejoice in the Lord sums up all that Paul has been saying. Paul has been emphasizing joy and rejoicing all through those two chapters.

Thus, we find Philippians 3:1 as a transition between the first two chapters and what follows. Chapters 1 and 2 held the broader theme of joy and rejoicing. Philippians 3:1 can be seen either as a summary of those chapters, or a shift into a new direction with Paul getting us ready to look at something new; a new topic. It emphasizes what has been said and prepares us for what lies ahead.

“Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh (Phil. 3:2).

Interesting that the Jews often referred to Gentiles as dogs. Even Jesus used the term when telling the Canaanite woman that the Jews should come first.

“And he answered, “It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.” She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table” (Matt. 15:26-27).

Now, here’s Paul saying watch out for dogs. Well, who are these dogs, and evil workers? Judaizers! Jewish legalists who were professing to be Christian believers were literally hounding other believers that all had to live by the strict aspects of the Jewish Law if they were indeed going to be saved. They were pushing a works-based philosophy of salvation.

As we develop that, let’s go back to our starting verse. “Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.” Rejoice in the Lord; not in how good you are; not in what you’ve done; not what you want people to see you do. Rejoice in the Lord. And, rejoice in His teaching. In His actions. In His sacrifice. In His message.

The Judaizers were claiming to be messengers of the good news through good works when in fact Paul was calling them evil workers. These people were sharing a corrupt kind of gospel that people could only be saved by faith **PLUS** the good works of the Law.

The truth is, and it is developed throughout the New Testament, that the good news of Jesus Christ is that salvation is grace alone (it's a gift), through faith alone (not by works), in Christ alone (not by any means other than the person and work of Christ). Isn't it interesting that about 30 years after Christ walked among us there were already those making up rules different from what Christ taught? It happened then and it happens even now. That has not changed.

We are to rejoice in the Lord and what He has done for us; not in any human or man-made means of trying to gain favor with God or gain our salvation from God. Then Paul continues along these lines by saying "look out for those who mutilate the flesh."

We may not like to talk about circumcision but that is what the Bible says, and we'll use it. The Jews were known throughout their history by the circumcision of Jewish males. That had been true for centuries.

In Genesis 17, in the same chapter in which Abraham's name was changed from Abram, God made his first covenant with the Jewish people:

"And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you (Gen. 17:7).

After that, God's covenants were made to the Jewish people who, the Circumcision, because of a condition in Genesis 17:10, where God said, "Every male among you shall be circumcised."

Thereafter, through all the centuries, through their exile into Egypt, through the Jew's time in the desert, through the capture and taking of the Promised Land, the Jews were known as the circumcision. Through the judges, the kings, and all the prophets, ages and ages of Jews were known as the circumcision.

All of God's promises and covenants were made to the circumcision. Only as a part of the circumcision could anyone hope to be saved, and that only through the works of the Law given to the circumcision. And when you hear that, you must wonder, "where is my hope?" Where do I come in? I'm not a Jew. I'm not a part of the circumcision that God talks about in the Old Testament. What about me? Paul continues:

"For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God[b] and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— (Phil. 3:3).

There are five words at the beginning of verse three that should change your entire idea of how the Old Testament applies to those of us Christians living today. **"For we are the circumcision..."**

God's covenants are everlasting and will remain unchanged forever. They aren't revoked. They are not reduced. God's covenants are forever. And I know you've been taught that a covenant is so much more than just a contract. A covenant is permanent.

What has happened though, through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ is that the circumcision has changed! The defining of the people of the circumcision has changed; and that, ladies and gentlemen, is the great halleluiah!

If you are a born again, believing Christian, you are the circumcision. Every promise of the Old Testament, every covenant God made to the circumcision, now applies to you. And that is a big deal.

Paul made sure to point out the difference in what the Judaizers taught and what the true believers should practice. First, true believers "worship in the Spirit of God," meaning they focus on the works of the divine Jesus Christ, not on any fleshly or worldly means of salvation through works.

Second, they don't brag about their works or achievements in keeping the Law, but "glory in Christ Jesus." They don't point to themselves for their work to be saved, but to Jesus to be saved.

And, thirdly, true believers "put no confidence in the flesh." By that, they don't point to themselves as evidence of Christ's goodness, but to Christ as the ultimate goodness.

As a contrast, Paul points out in the rest of that passage and going into verse 4, that he, Paul, should be a member of the hall of fame for works-based believers, at least according to the Law: Circumcised on the eighth day according to covenant; Born into the Nation of Israel (not a Gentile); Member of the tribe of Benjamin; A true Hebrew; A Pharisee; well educated in the Law; Zealous persecutor of the Way, the Christian church; Blameless with regard to external righteousness found in the Law.

If anybody could claim to have salvation based upon the works of the Law it would be Paul. He had all the trophies. He had all the honors. Paul wasn't bragging about what he had done; he was putting the Judaizers in their place because none of them could claim more than Paul could claim in the worldly sense.

A first century Jew would be highly impressed with Paul's pedigree. And up until the time of Christ, that was the standard. Paul had achieved that standard according to the Law. Paul was the guy that young Rabbinical students would look at and talk about – yes, that's the guy. He's the good one. He's going places. And then, Damascus. And, then it all changed.

"But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 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 (Phil. 3:7-8a).

Paul was probably in his mid-30's when he was converted on the Damascus Road. Due to his age and training, Paul was likely in Jerusalem when Jesus was there teaching, and when he was crucified. Thus, by the time Paul headed to Damascus to persecute the church, he was well-trained and well-indoctrinated in the ways of the Jews and as a Pharisee. We can easily say, Paul had his doctorate in theology in the Law.

Yet, here is Paul, saying all those years, all that training, all of the sacrifice, all of that striving to be perfect was lost. Everything Paul had or had achieved up until that point was loss. He said he counted it all as rubbish.

Looking at the King James version of the Bible, it uses a stronger word. All of it was "dung." Paul rejected all that he had learned, all his knowledge, all his legal skills at keeping the Law, all the self-righteousness based on his pedigree and prominence as a Jew. He dumped all that as worthless garbage or dung in favor of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, his Lord.

That's impressive. We males often get to the point in life that we are what we do. We are who we are because we're teachers; or we're ranchers; or engineers, or technicians, or lawyers, or doctors, or whatever. We don't give up what we are very easily because it so often affects who we are.

And women do it to. They get to be mothers, or wives, or social workers, or grandmothers, or they become their careers in medicine, or law, or teaching. We all tend to become what we do. That's why retirement for some folks is so difficult. They are all about what they are as being who they are. That's not a bad thing, but that is a real thing. And Paul was giving up all of what he was so that he could then become what he should be – a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul did not regret the loss, either. To be sure, he truly had valued who he was as a Pharisee. Otherwise, he would not have set out to do what he was doing to the young Christian church. It was hard to achieve what Paul had achieved as a Pharisee. You couldn't just go to synagogue a few weeks and gain membership as a Pharisee. It was a year's long process.

All the glory Paul had in being what he was faded in the light of the glory of Christ. That bright light on the Damascus Road caused all earthly things of Paul to fade into total darkness.

"For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 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— that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead (Phil. 3:8b-11).

Paul is literally shouting out a "good riddance" to all the baggage of his past life. Instead of mourning the loss of so much, Paul was rejoicing in the Lord. Why is that? In the word

of Paul: That I may be found in Him (Jesus); Not have a righteousness of my own that comes from the law; Have the righteousness from God that depends on faith; That I may know Him, Jesus Christ; That I may share His suffering; That I may become like Him; That I may experience the power of the resurrection.

Here's a good way to summarize what Paul was saying about this. In salvation, our sin and guilt are credited to Christ, and His righteousness is credited to us. That is called imputation, which is a term that means to credit something to a person's account. It was a transfer. Because Paul was now in Christ, everything that Christ had done through His death and resurrection had been given to, or credited to, Paul.

For you and me, that transfer of righteousness is credited to us the moment we embrace Christ by faith. And not only do we receive a credit of righteousness, but there is also a cancelation of all our sin debts; sin in the past, sin in the present and in the future. Sin is gone and only righteousness remains.

All that is left is life, and life everlasting, and godliness. To be sure, we are still in the process of sanctification. Sanctification is the process whereby we are renewed; our whole person becomes new. Justification is the completed act or declaration by God that you are His own through Jesus Christ.

Sanctification is the process of renewal whereby we become more Christ-like in our thoughts, actions, and deeds. That isn't the same thing as works, so don't mix that up. Sanctification comes **after** faith in Jesus has done its work in us to justify us. The works-based message of the Judaizers was that you worked your way into faith. They had it backwards.

Here's the first of two big ideas from today's passage. Our new relationship with Christ is the power of Christ's resurrection becoming a present reality, allowing us to rejoice in the Lord, even as we share in the suffering of Christ. Even when the worldly things around are not all that good, we can and do rejoice knowing that even as we suffer, we will also experience the resurrection and eternal life with Christ.

"Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own (Phil. 3:12).

Paul has made it clear that his faith in Christ is what living is all about. It isn't about what he did, or what he was. And it isn't about what we have done or what we are. It is all about our faith in Jesus Christ. And, through that faith, Paul was engaged in a process of making it his own. He was not perfect and admitted as much, but he was pressing on to make it his own because Christ had made Paul his own.

That is what we do. We continue to press forward; sometimes we may feel like it's three steps forward and two back, but it is still forward. Pressing forward against all struggles, making Christ's example our own because Christ has made us his own.

Our world likes to divide people. You see it all around and in just about everything in culture. We're divided by politics, by race, by education, by working inside or working outside, by not working or by working, by just about everything there is an effort to divide us into categories. And, if you're not in the "right" category you're somehow less than you should be.

We get divided by who are good people, and who are not-so-good people. But this argument about good versus evil is, according to the Bible, totally false. People are not basically good. The world is not getting better. Hope in humanity improving is a false hope. The truth is the world is in pretty, rough shape. We see that war is the norm, not peace. Quarrels, arguments, conflicts, lawsuits, feuds, broken marriages, busted partnerships, conflicting personalities.

All those things exist and the more people there are, the more they exist. And the reason for that is the sin and depravity of the human race. Death, destructions, pain, greed, and chaos are what we see the most of when we take a measure of humanity.

You must ask yourself, if I'm a Christian, why am I here. I already rejoice in the Lord. Get me out of here. I'm ready to go home! Keep in mind that the Christian life is a marathon, it isn't a sprint. And the marathon isn't over nice soft paths of even grass and ground. It's over rocks, boulders, gullies, bumps, and stumps.

Life has pitfalls, and it can be dangerous. Satan is still alive and well on planet earth. So, again, why are we still here? Over the next few verses Paul answers that, but we must build a bit more of a foundation first.

"Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:12-14).

Here, Paul is telling us that the one thing he will do is press on toward the goal for the prize. He forgets what is behind him, meaning whatever struggles he has gone through, and straining forward to what lies ahead, he presses on to the prize. If you know Paul's history, you know he had some struggles. He was beaten, stoned, ship-wrecked, put in prison, chased by mobs, and generally treated badly so much of his ministry life.

Paul, however, was putting all of that behind him. Paul let go of all those bad things and put them behind him. Paul was looking only to the future and not dwelling on the past.

What about you? Are you carrying around with you a sack full of your old problems? Do you have a ruck sack with your trash, dirty socks, and underwear in it? Are you carrying around all the bad junk that you did in the past, remembering it, and letting it fester in your mind and heart? Are you packing around all the grudges you ever carried, and all the wrongs that people did to you those many years ago?

Paul said to forget what lies behind. I'm sure he has a double meaning here. He is saying forget all the things that made him the Jew and Pharisee that he was. He was also saying to forget about past failures, past sins that have been forgiven. Paul says to get rid of that. Get rid of all the self-righteous justification you have, such as the good things you did way back when and get rid of all the old junk and trash that you carry around, too.

How do we get there? How do we drop all the junk out of our minds and move forward? In this passage, Paul describes our journey through life with at least five major principles that we need to keep in mind.

First, God's plan is progress, not perfection. God is perfect but we are not. Paul said it clearly that he had not yet gained perfection, but he was in progress. That is the same path that everyone of us is on. We are not perfected, but we are progressing – that is, moving forward and upward in the process of sanctification. Paul had been justified by the actions of Christ—he was saved.

Paul was being sanctified by the process of growing in Christ. And, one day Paul would be glorified – that is, resurrected with Christ. This journey of life is not easy. If it was easy the Bible wouldn't contain so many examples of persevering in the face of adversity.

The second thing from this section is that the past is over; leave it behind. How are we going to press on toward the future when our eyes are on the road behind us? If all our driving is looking out our rear-view mirror, how are we pressing ahead? If you drive forward looking only at the rear-view mirror you're going in the ditch!

It's all in the past. As the 1964 song by Chad and Jeremy said, "That was yesterday, and yesterday's gone." All the things that we pack into our memory that distract us from pressing on to the ultimate prize need to be forgotten and left behind.

Third, we need to remember that the future holds out hope, so reach for the future. As we let go of our past, we reach out to our future. It's like swinging on a jungle vine. You sail through the air, but you must let go of one vine as you grasp the next. You can't have both at the same time or you'll go nowhere. And if you hang between two vines long enough, you're going to fall off. Let go of the past and look forward.

Fourth, a determined attitude wins the prize. Paul reminds us that it's all about attitude; by that, we must set our mind on doing that which needs to be done. We focus all our attention on pressing on to the Christian life, just as Paul did 2,000 years ago.

We haven't yet reached the end of our journey. We're still here. The question of "Why am I still here?" has not yet been answered. You're not out of here just yet, so I know you haven't completed the trip. Until we do, until we reach the end of life's journey we do continue to press on. Paul was in prison when he wrote Philippians, yet he was continuing to press on to the goal.

Fifth, and finally, we need to maintain a high standard of performance in this Christian life. We can't slack off and expect good results. There is no time to just coast downhill because

there aren't many downhill spots. It is very much like a race. If you relax, you won't be first. The good part of this race is that you're a part of a team that encourages you to keep up the pace. And, even if we falter the team will help us pick up the pace. And, even if we falter still, God will continue to work with us toward that upward call in Christ Jesus.

Once you're on Christ's team, there is no losing—only winning. And what does Paul say about that.

“Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained (Phil. 3:15-16).

If you still need some help in puzzling out what you need to do, that is part of the process. Paul tells us that God will reveal to you what needs to be done. God will reveal that to you through His Holy Word, the Bible, through accurate biblical teachers, through prayers, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit; and, frankly, through maturity in our Christian walk.

Paul tells us, to hold true to what we have attained. What have we attained? Our new relationship with Christ. It is the power of Christ's resurrection becoming a present reality. It allows us to rejoice in the Lord, even as we share in the suffering of Christ. It is knowing we will also experience the resurrection and eternal life with Christ.

In this next section Paul gives us some markers and guideposts for us to use to get through this journey we call life.

“Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us (Phil. 3:17).

Paul's guidepost was Christ, and what Christ said, what he did and what he taught. As we look to Christ, we can also look to Paul to see what he said, what he did, and what he taught. Well, we don't have a detailed example of the day-to-day life of Paul, so how can we use that? We may not have an example, but we do have examples all around us of men and women who have persevered in the Christian life for years and years; and through all kinds of struggles.

This verse, and then 18 and 19, gives us three things to look at. First, we need godly examples to follow. We can look to the men and women around us for good examples of how to press on toward the goal. We can look at them and respect them and what they have done. As I was working on this Billy Graham came to mind. What a life that man did lead. He was a great example.

But, closer to us, there are other godly men and women that you can cast a glance to and see how they live; what they do. I'm sure there are men and women in this church you can look to. And keep in mind they are human. That make mistakes. Generally, though, their path is straight and true. Look at the total work of a person's life as an example.

“Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even

with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things (Phil. 3:17-19).

Second, even with the good examples around us, we live among enemies of the cross of Christ. These are the negative talkers, the nay-sayers, those with destructive comments within the body of believers. They are driven by what they can get today and are dedicated to material things at all costs. Material things are not bad in and of themselves and in fact can be a great benefit to the kingdom. But gain for the purpose of gain is selfishness.

As we go along on this journey, we can't easily forget the reason that Christ left us here once we were justified in Him through faith. Our mission on earth continues, just as the Great Commission says, to call the unbelievers to believe in Jesus Christ; to encourage them to submit to the teachings and leading of Christ; and to submit to His kingdom.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:19-20).

That answers the question of "Why am I still here?" We are still here to persevere in our process of sanctification, to present the gospel to those all around us, and to prepare ourselves for our eternal reward of life forevermore with Jesus Christ.

"But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself (Phil. 3:20-21).

The third part of this section is that we belong to those who are bound to heaven. There is certainly a warning about the evil doers among us, and we need that warning from Paul. But, as believers, we are to set our minds on the things above; to Heaven.

The second big idea for today's study is this. One day we will be home in heaven. This long, hard, painful journey will eventually end. Eventually, we will be free from all the pain, heartache, sorrow, and agony of this world. We will be reunited with Christ and all those who have gone before us, to eternally be with Christ our King.

As John the Apostle wrote in The Revelation of Christ:

"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:3-4).

This sermon on Philippians chapter 3 is a teaching by the Hon. Judge Albert "Buddy" McCaig. This was preached on May 22, 2022 at Union Grove Baptist Church of Whitehall. UGBC is one the oldest Baptist churches in Texas. It is located at 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868