

To Know Him - Dedicated to Dick Phillips

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Bible Text: Philippians 3:10

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As you all know yesterday was the day of our...of the funeral of our dear friend and deacon in the church, Dick Phillips. Dick was someone I appreciated very much. We became very dear and close friends and I know I am going to miss him very, very much.

I want to dedicate my message this morning to Dick, remembering him. Now I have a reason for that. I am speaking about a text today that pictures, I believe, a leader in the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the pattern of life that is described in it, I believe, is the kind of life that Dick Phillips lived. And so this message is dedicated to his memory as we remember our dear brother in Christ.

The text I am going to be preaching from this morning is Philippians chapter three and verse 10. Now next week we are actually going to back up and we are going to look at an earlier portion of this chapter, but today I wanted to focus on that particular verse, verse 10. And let me read it for you now.

It says, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings."¹

Let me ask you a question, a question that I do not expect you to answer. It is a rhetorical question. What is the most important thing in your life? What is more important than anything else?

Well, I hope that since we are in a church where we honor the Lord Jesus Christ there would be some spiritual dynamic to that particular question and its answer. I hope that you would speak of your love of the Lord, that the passion that you have for serving him.

I wonder what it would be like if I walked down the streets of Savannah and just grabbed a hold of the first person I saw and said, "Hey, what's the most important thing in your life?" I wonder what responses I would get.

Well, I think there would be many different possibilities. There would be some people who would say, "Well, you know, the most important thing in my life is to earn a lot of money. I want to be wealthy. I want to have things."

¹ Philippians 3:10

Oh, I can remember so many people that I have met in my life whose focus in life is centered on what they could have, what they could own. And I have met some of the saddest, the most unhappy, the most dissatisfied people who at the same time were among the wealthiest because there is nothing wrong with wealth, nothing wrong with having money. But if that is the center of your life, if that is what you focus on, you will never be happy because you will never have enough. There is always more.

There are some people who will focus on position and honor. I spent 27 years in the military and, of course, we all know the military is a place where rank is very, very important and on the uniform that you wear, you wear the insignia of your rank and everybody can look and know exactly where you are in the structure, in the hierarchy. And I can remember people who were totally dissatisfied because they hadn't quite reached the rank that they wanted. I remember one man in particular who was a lieutenant colonel. At the time I was of much lower rank than that and I remember talking with him and he told me that he was going to retire from the army because the promotion board was coming up soon and he was afraid that he wouldn't make it to full colonel. And so just to make sure that there wouldn't be any problem, he is not going to give them a chance to reject him. He is just going to retire. Rank was more important to him than just about anything else.

Well, what is the most important thing in your life? Someday when I get to heaven I am looking forward to asking that question to the apostle Paul. "Paul, let me know what the most important thing in your life was." I am not absolutely certain, but I am going to take a guess that Paul will turn to this verse of Scripture and quote it to me. For in this verse he talks about three things that are the most important thing in his life. He says, "I want to know him. I want to know the power of his resurrection. I want to know the fellowship of his sufferings."²

As we look at each of these three things we will see that in some sense they sound very strange. And yet they are significant and important to us.

He starts out by saying, "I want to know him."³

Well, I would ask the question, "Paul, what are you talking about? You knew him. You knew Jesus Christ. I remember reading in the Bible in the book of Acts about that climactic experience that you had on the road to Damascus and how you encountered the living Christ. I remember the story of how you went into Arabia to sit at the feet of the Lord. How can you say, 'I want to know him,' when you already knew him?"

Well, you know, there is a difference between knowing and really knowing. Let me explain what I mean by that.

² See Philippians 3:10

³ Ibid.

How many of you are married? You are allowed to raise your hand. It is ok. It is a good thing. It is not a bad thing. Ok.

Now I want you to think back for a moment. I want you to think what you were thinking of that person that you married three months before you got married. Now, I want you to think about that.

I can imagine you fellows were saying something like, “Oh, she is the most beautiful thing on the face of the earth. I mean wow. I just can’t wait till our wedding day.”

And you women were saying, “Oh, man, how could I have gotten such a wonderful husband? I’m so excited we’re going to be married.”

Now I want you to think again about what your thoughts were three months after you got married. Do you understand what I am getting at? I’m sure you were still very happy, but, you know, if you ask my wife you will probably find out that I am a total and inveterate slob, aren’t I? No. Don’t answer that. She didn’t know that three months before we were married, but I think she knows it now.

You see, until you have an intimate relationship with a person, until you are intimately connected with a person, you don’t really know that person in depth. And I believe that is what the apostle Paul was talking about here. He says, “I want to know Christ.” And he knew Christ. He had had an encounter with him. He loved Christ. But his desire was to really know Christ, to have an intimacy of a relationship with him, one that could only be described as a relationship of love, a relationship that would unite the two.

Well, how did Paul gain that relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ? I can think of three ways. First of all, Paul was a student of the Word of God. He said, “Study to show yourselves approved unto God, a workman who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth.”⁴ He was a man who was centered in God’s Word. It was important to him. I can guarantee you that every day of his life he was in the book studying.

Interestingly enough, when he wrote his second letter to Timothy—chronologically this was the last letter that Paul wrote—he was in prison. At that point he was probably not going to live much longer. We believe that he was put to death shortly after the writing of this letter. And what did he say? Well, he wrote to Timothy and he said, “Timothy, when you come to see me I want you to bring certain things.” He said, “I want you to bring my cloak.” If you have ever seen the dungeons as they were in Rome in that day you can understand it was a place that was cold. He needed his cloak to keep him warm. And then he said, “Bring the books and the parchments.”⁵ These were portions of the Word of God and he wanted to be able to study God’s Word even in the last days of his life. Just before he would die he wanted to be there studying the Word of God, making it a vital and important part of his life.

⁴ See 2 Timothy 2:15

⁵ See 2 Timothy 4:13

Christians today need to do the same thing. God has given us what we would call—and what we heard in our sermon starter—is an instruction book for life.

You have read instructions, haven't you? I remember, and I think I have told you this, I had a household appliance one time that had to be put together. And I tried and I tried and I tried to put the thing together. It didn't work. It just didn't work.

My dear wife made a wonderful suggestion. She said, "Why don't you read the directions?"

Do you know what happened? I read the directions. I put it together and it worked.

Life is a lot like that. God has given us this book, the Bible, as our direction book for life. If we don't read the directions, then we don't know how to live. Paul was a student of the Word of God. And, therefore, he was able to live as God wanted him to live.

Well, that is one of the ways in which he came to know Christ. The second one is that he was a man of prayer. Paul was the one who said, "Pray without ceasing."⁶

Sometimes you may ask, "How in the world can I do that?"

I mean, you have other things to do in life, don't you? I mean, you know, if you go to work you have to work all day. You can't be praying. If you are a student you have to go to school. You can't be praying. You have to be studying your work. What does he mean when he says, "Pray without ceasing"?⁷

I believe Paul is saying here that we are to have an attitude of prayer, that our life is to be focused on our communication with God, that that communication is to be normal and a normal part of our lives. If something good comes into our life we go to God, we praise him for it. That should be natural. Something that we consider bad comes into our lives. We praise him anyway, but we go to him and we pray for his help and his concern and his love.

You see, Paul's attitude of prayer was an attitude that brought him closer to the Lord and helped him to know Christ better.

He said, "I want to know him."⁸ He came to know him by the study of the Word of God and by prayer. And I think a third way is the communion he had with fellow believers.

We don't know for sure who wrote the book of Hebrews. I am convinced it was Paul who wrote it, but that doesn't matter. In Hebrews we are told that we are not to forsake the

⁶ 1 Thessalonians 5:17

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ See Philippians 3:10

assembling of ourselves together as is the practice of some.⁹ In other words, we are to gather together as God's people.

Now we are doing that today. That is what we do in church. We gather together. But I don't think this is only talking about church. I think this is giving us direction that we are to spend much of our time in fellowship with other Christians, that our closest associates are to be people who know the Lord Jesus Christ.

I think of that encounter—and you can read about it in the book of Acts—when Peter was in prison. And you will remember the story, how an angel opened up the gates of the prison and Peter was able to walk out of the prison.

We read that he immediately went to a certain house and there there was a gathering of believers. It is kind of an interesting story. It talks about his going to the door—and I can just picture this. He knocks at the door. And a young lady by the name of Rhoda comes to the door. And Rhoda looks out, sees Peter, runs back in and says it, "It's Peter, it's Peter."

And they say, "Nah, it can't be Peter, he is in jail."

She goes out and checks again. "Yeah, it's Peter. It really is."

Somebody probably came up with the bright idea, "Why don't you open the door and let him in?"¹⁰

Well, she finally did and Peter joined the group.

My question is: How did Peter know that that is where the believer's were? There is no indication that this was the Lord's Day. It was not a gathering of people in church. Do you know how he knew? Because that is where they always got together. That was normal for them. The Christians would gather in a certain place and have fellowship with one another and enjoy one another, pray with one another, love one another. That was normal.

You see, we need to be doing the same thing. If we want to know Christ we have to be students of the Word of God. We have to be men and women of prayer. And we have to be those who fellowship with other believers that we might gain the strength and knowledge of the Word that we get from one another.

Paul says, "I want to know him."¹¹ But he goes on. He says, "I want to know the power of his resurrection."¹²

⁹ See Hebrews 10:25

¹⁰ Acts 12:5-17

¹¹ See Philippians 3:10

¹² Ibid.

You may ask the question: How is it possible for the power that raised Christ from the dead to have any effect on our lives today? What is the connection? Well, the Word of God talks about our salvation as a resurrection. Do you realize that when we come to know Christ we have, in fact, been raised from the dead?

The word of God tells us that as unbelievers we are dead in our trespasses and sins and that Christ in his matchless love has raised us up again to newness of life. It is exciting that we have a new life in Jesus Christ.

Listen to these words that we read in the book of Romans in chapter six. I am going to begin reading with verse three.

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried with him therefore by baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.¹³

We have been raised with Christ. In the book of Colossians he said, “If therefore you have been raised with Christ...”¹⁴ He is just assuming that that has happened, “seek those things which are above where Christ sits at the right hand of God.”¹⁵

We have been raised to a new life.

Well, how do we live that new life in Christ? How do we make that effective in our lives? Well, we are not going to take the time to go through Romans chapter six, but at your leisure you need to read that very, very carefully because it tells us. It tells us that there are steps that we need to take. If we have this new life we are to trust in God that that life can make a change in the way we live from day to day.

This is how it is described to us. It says that we are no longer to allow the members of our body to do the things that they did they before, but we are to use them for his glory.¹⁶

Now what in the world does that mean? The members of our body, our hands, our feet, our mouth, our eyes. Before knowing Christ they were used to do things that dishonored God. They were used to do things that did not lift up and honor the Lord Jesus. There were times that those feet might take us to places where we should not go, where those hands would cause us to do things that didn't honor the Lord, where our eyes would look on things that didn't honor him.

¹³ Romans 6:3-4

¹⁴ See Colossians 3:1

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ See Romans 6:13

And now we can take those members of our body and use them for Christ. We take one step at a time, trusting that he will enable us to do this. Our feet can now take us to a place of worship. Our eyes can look upon the Word of God. Our hands can do those things that bring glory and honor to the name of the Savior because we are new creatures in Christ and we have been raised to a new life.

Why is it, I wonder, that so many Christians don't seem to have grasped this attitude of the new life in Christ? It reminds me of a story that I was once told, a true story of a young man who lived in a very, very poor country. It happened to be in South America. It could have been anywhere else, a very, very poor country. He had a great opportunity and that was to go to, what he considered to be the land of opportunity. It is called the United States. And he went to the United States and he got a job. It wasn't a fabulous job, but by the standards of his country he was making a lot of money. And every month he would send a money order to his mother for \$100.

Well, that doesn't sound like a fortune to us, but I'll tell you where she lived in this poor country in South America, that was a fortune.

And month after month after month he would send this money order for \$100 to his mom. Well, one day a couple of years later he had a chance to go home. And he walked into the town where he lived and he saw one of his old friends and he said, "Where is my mother?"

"Oh, she's still in the same house she was in before."

"I wonder why she is living in that old house. I mean, she has enough money now to move."

And he went to the street and he walked down the street and there was the same old house, dilapidated as it was before, possibly even a little worse than when he had left.

His mother came running out of the house wearing the same tattered rags that she had been wearing when he left. And he she threw her arms around him.

And he looked at her and said, "Mother, why are you dressed like that? Why are you living like this?"

And she said, "I'm a poor woman. How can I live any other way?"

"Well, what about all the money I've been sending you?"

"What money?"

"The money orders that I have been sending you every month."

She looked at him and said, “Do you mean those funny looking colored papers? I’ll show them to you.”

And they walked in the house. And there were all the money orders plastered on the wall covering up a whole that had been there. She didn’t know the value of what she had received. It was just something pretty so she could cover the holes with it, hundreds and hundreds of dollars plastered on the wall doing her no good at all.

I wonder whether it isn’t the reality that many Christians have simply not grasped the reality of the new life in Christ. Don’t realize that God has raised them from the death of sin to the life that is in Christ that they might live for his honor and his glory.

Paul says, “I want to know him and the power of his resurrection.”¹⁷ And then, thirdly, and lastly he says, “I want to know the fellowship of his sufferings.”¹⁸

Now I’m going to ask you folks. How many of you would like to suffer? I don’t see a single hand go up. How about if I could give you suffering on a silver platter? Any of you accept it? No? How about on a gold platter, suffering on a gold platter?

No, you know I am being a little silly. Nobody wants to suffer.

Well, what, then, does Paul mean when he speaks here of the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings that he wants?

Well, in order for us to really understand this we need to ask the question, first of all, why did Christ suffer? And obviously we would say, “Well, the reason, the primary reason he suffered was to buy a salvation for us that we might have the joy of eternal life.” And that is what he did. He bought that salvation by suffering on the cross of Calvary for us. What a blessing, what a gift.

But do you know if we look, focus on what was happening, he actually suffered because he told the truth. He made it abundantly clear that he was the Christ, that he was the one who was to come, that he was the one who was to provide eternal life for his people. If Jesus had—and obviously he could not do this because he was the eternal God, he was honest, he only told the truth—but if he said, “I am not the Christ. I didn’t come to die for the sins of people.” Well, nobody would have put him on the cross. He wouldn’t have suffered.

But because he faithfully told the truth, he died on the cross and dying he brought to us the blessing of everlasting life.

Paul also suffered, the one who wrote this. If you get a chance, read the book of 2 Corinthians. You will find a description in there, the latter chapters, of Paul’s sufferings. We are told that he was stoned. And you will remember the story of how they stoned him

¹⁷ See Philippians 3:10

¹⁸ Ibid.

and left him for dead.¹⁹ God graciously preserved his life. He was whipped with scourges. He was beaten. He was rejected. And yet faithfully he bore in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus and went ahead and continued to be faithful in serving him.

Many throughout the ages have suffered because of their faith in Christ. I remember the story of one of the early church leaders whose name was Polycarp. Polycarp was a great man of God. He loved the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul. And the day had come that the authorities of his day had dragged him into a place where he was to be executed, he was to be burned at the stake. And they had him tied up to the stake and the wood was there ready to be set on fire. And those who were talking to him spoke to him. This was an older man. He was about 80 years old. They spoke to him and they said, “If you will deny Christ we will let you live.”

And this great man of faith who could have saved his life by simply saying the words, “I deny my faith,” looked into the eyes of those who were to execute him and he said, “Over 80 years I have served Jesus Christ. He has never done me wrong. How can I now deny the Lord who saved me?”

And so they lit the fire. And so he died for his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Many people even in today’s world suffer because of their faith. Sometimes I think that the apparent shallowness of faith that we experience in our country is because we don’t suffer. Now, I am not saying...I am not suggesting that I want any suffering. But I am saying that it is relatively easy to proclaim that you are a Christian in our country today. The worst thing that might happen would be something like this. If you go out and witness for the Lord it may be that somebody won’t like you. In fact, I have met Christians who, if you ask them, “Are you going to share your faith with others?” Their attitude is something like this. “If I tell people about Christ, they are not going to like me. They are not going to appreciate me.”

Now compare that to what Paul went through. I compare that to what so many in the Church throughout the ages have experienced. And it is nothing.

But there are those who will say, “Well, I’ll lose friends.”

What is more important, the friend or the ultimate friend, the Lord Jesus Christ?

You see, we need to be faithful. And if it means a little bit of suffering, someone not liking us, someone not appreciating us, we need to be faithful anyway and serve the Lord and honor him in all that we say and all that we do, that Jesus Christ would be glorified through our witness of him.

The Word of God says in the words of the apostle Paul, “I want to know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings.”²⁰

¹⁹ See Acts 14:19

²⁰ See Philippians 3:10

Yesterday as I was at Dick Phillips' funeral, I was thinking of a couple things. And one of them was, "I wonder what Dick is doing right now?"

Did you ever think about that after someone who loves the Lord and someone you have appreciated passes on from this life? There are a couple of things that I thought of. First of all, Dick was one who was always faithful in terms of wanting to study the Word of God. He was here all the time. He was one who opened his Bible and wanted to learn from it. He was one who would talk about how he wanted to live for the Lord and honor him and glorify him. He was one that I believed would be perfectly willing to share his faith regardless of the consequences of sharing his faith.

And I was thinking. I wonder what Dick is doing right now? Well, my guess is he is wandering around the courts of heaven, getting to meet some of the other brethren who have gone on before him, sharing and loving them, but, above all, he is there praising the Lord, the one that he honored in his life.

We, my friends, have what is a relatively short time on earth. If we look at the history of human life on earth—and I don't know exactly how long. There are different ideas as to how long human beings have been here on this earth. Certainly not the millions of years that some people have suggested, but several thousand anyway—and we begin to look at history and we think of our life span, Dick was 77. Some of us may die very early in life. I have known people who have died in their 20s. And some of us may live to be old. I remember meeting a dear man who was 102 and was still living. Even if we would live to be 100 that is a speck of time in the history of this world. And that time needs to count for Jesus Christ.

I tell you, my friends, any of you who are getting close to my age or around my age you know how quickly life goes by, how the years just seem to zip by and disappear. And the day will come that each one of us will be in the presence of the Lord if we know him as Savior. How important it is that those fleeting years that we experience on earth be dedicated to his service, "That I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings."²¹

Let's pray together.

Gracious Father, we have come together to worship you, to honor you and to love you. We thank you, our Father, that you have loved us with an everlasting love. You have given to us the blessings, the wonderful blessings of life forever. And we ask, our Father, that in this life we might be so completely and wholly dedicated to you that people might see us and really not see us, see our Father who is in heaven and glorify him. Help us, dear Lord, to seek to know more about you, to love you, to honor you, to appreciate who you are and to live our lives for your glory. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

²¹ Philippians 3:10