

Noble Ambition

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We continue our worship now as we open God's word for the teaching of Scripture and for the past several weeks, we have been teaching through Philippians 2 and 3 and we gladly return there for our text this morning. Philippians 3. I'm going to read verses 8 through 11. It is a text that is intensely concentrated with most important truth. It takes a moment or two simply to read it and then to unpack it takes many many hours, really, and we're going to try to do our best to lend our voice to the understanding of this text with the help of the Holy Spirit here this morning.

We're going to begin in verse 8, reading through verse 11. The Apostle Paul says,

8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, 9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Now last time we focused on the first two verses in this passage, verses 8 and 9, and we answered the question whose righteousness, in other words, we looked at the biblical issue of whose righteousness it is that entitles us, that gains us access into heaven and into a restored relationship with God, whose righteousness is it that provides forgiveness of sin for us and makes us meet, as it were, to enter into the presence of a holy God. Well, the Apostle Paul answered that question not only for himself but for men of all time in the words that he spoke in verse 9. He says that he wants to gain Christ "not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law." It is not our righteousness that will gain us access into heaven. It is not our righteousness that can procure the forgiveness of our sins. We are fallen, apart from Christ we are lost and there is nothing that we can do to correct that situation on our own. There is no obedience that you can render to God that is sufficient for his holiness. There is nothing that you can do that can erase the stain of your past sins. Your hands are stained with the blood of the guilt of your sin and there is nothing that you can do to wash them and get them clean. You can pour lye on your soul,

so to speak, self-righteous lye on your soul and the stain remains and there is nothing that you can do.

So it is not our righteousness, it is not our obedience, it is not our merit in accordance with the law of God that gives us what we need, and Paul rejects all of that and says by contrast instead, look at it there in the middle of verse 9, he says, "but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith." My friends, if we are in Christ, it is because God has graciously given to us a gift of his own righteousness that we have received by faith that we did not deserve and that we did not earn. Salvation is not a reward given to people who obey God, it is a gift given to people who are guilty of disobeying God. It is a free gift and therefore received by faith rather than something that is earned by your personal merit, and Paul could not be more clear on that point than what he has stated there in verse 9, "not a righteousness of my own, but that which comes from Christ, received by faith, the righteousness which comes from God." That's why it's called an alien righteousness, alien in the sense that it is outside of us. It is not intrinsic to us. It is not something that we have done. We come as guilty, vile sinners before God and ask for mercy in Christ and in the name of Christ, and God graciously grants us a status of righteousness that is an imputed righteousness based on the very righteousness of Christ himself. This is the doctrine of biblical justification. Justification being the idea that God pardons all of our sins and accepts us as righteous in his sight based not on our merit but based on the righteousness of Christ which is received by faith.

So to be a true Christian and to confess the biblical faith is not to say, "I have attained some kind of goodness that God is going to honor." To be a biblical Christian is not to say, it is not to say just to emphasize that very crucial point, it is not to say that, "I'm going to go to heaven because the good outweighs the bad in my life." Words like that come out of the mouth of an unregenerate heart that does not understand the gospel. If you are here today and you are confessing to be a Christian, the true nature of a Christian confession is this, to say that you are a Christian is to say, "There is no good in me. There is nothing about my life that merits the favor of God. I have received that favor and I have received righteousness from Christ as a gift that I did not deserve and now I am secure in Him not based on what I have done but on what Christ has done on my behalf." It is a matter of a great eternal consequence for you to understand that and for that to be very very clear in your mind and that's why we, you know, we tend to repeat these things week after week after week. You know, just to give you a sense of why at least this pastor does what he does and what a lot of pastors do that, you know, are like-minded with us, the reason that we say these things over and over and over again is because the heart of men and women are so prone and so bound up with pride, so bound up with law obedience and a legal approach to God that say, "I do this and then God does this back," and it is just very very difficult and humanly impossible to pull that root of pride and legalism out of the heart and replace it with the truth of the gospel and the grace of God and the free gift of righteousness that is found only through faith in Christ alone.

So, yeah, I realize that I say these things repeatedly over and over and over again but the truth of the matter is that I often lay in bed at night thinking, "You know what? I haven't

emphasized it enough. I haven't said it enough." I lose sleep thinking, "I haven't said it enough," because this is the great dilemma of sinful men, trying to earn their way into favor with God in pride not recognizing their own sin, and in spiritual blindness not recognizing the free gift of God. Eternal life, Romans 6:23, is a free from God found by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And so we could never talk about this enough and Paul emphasizes it in those two verses that we just looked at.

What he said was this, he wanted to be found in Christ and we are found in Christ, we are justified, in other words, when we receive Christ and his righteousness by faith alone. Not by faith and then obeying a lot. No, by faith alone. When a man or a woman puts her faith in Christ, God immediately and instantly and forever declares them righteous, declares that man, that woman, has having – praise be to God, this is such glorious truth – as having the full righteousness of Christ credited to their account in a way that God will accept at final judgment, and to be justified in this life is to know in advance what God is going to declare about you on that great final day. God gives us the gift of justification now and that gift endures through final judgment and secures us and guarantees to us a pronouncement of favor from God in the end. Pronounced favor now, pronounced, declared righteousness now, and never to be taken away, one that satisfies at the judgment seat of Christ.

You know, I've said and I'll use this illustration again because it's just helpful and so clear and easy to understand. To approach God in any other way, to approach him on the basis of religious observance or personal obedience or just, you know, or just something about yourself, is to try to go into a great jewelry store and to buy the finest diamonds with Monopoly money. That currency does not work. That is not currency that has any value. Your works have no value in securing your position before God. It is only the righteousness of Christ that can do that.

Well, Paul has made that point in verses 8 and 9 and now as he goes on in verse 10 and continues this magnificent sentence, he turns his attention now to something else in verses 10 and 11, and I just want to give you a sense just from some verb tenses here to give you a sense of what is happening here. In verse 10, Paul is talking in a present tense sense, talking about what's happening in his human life as he was writing there in the first century, and what his desires were and what he was hoping for. Then in verse 11, he shifts to the future, he's looking to something yet to come. And that distinction between the present aspect of his desires and that future desire helps us understand something of what he is speaking about in this wonderful text.

What is it that happens to a Christian once they have been justified? Once they have been born again, what becomes of life for that person going forward? You see, a truly born again person is forever changed and never goes back to the prior unbroken pattern of sin in which he or she lived. There is a change that takes place. Down in the innermost core of one's being, God has planted the principle of his Holy Spirit and a principle of life and a principle of spiritual affections that work themselves out in a way that is continually transforming during the remainder of life. Not spiritual perfection, we've denied that and explained that in the past. It's not that a Christian becomes perfect, but there is an

ambition, you might say, that takes over their life and starts to increasingly shape their desires and what it is that they want out of life, and it reflects in a transformed heart with transformed attitudes which then work themselves out in the external nature of life as well. Then the great culmination of that is when we enter into the presence of Christ and we are made perfect then, all sin is removed and we are glorified, and we are with him forever and have been changed never to sin again, never to be tempted again, all sin removed and all desire for sin removed and we are made like Christ because we see him as he is. And in Philippians 3:20, look at it there with me, Philippians 3:20 you see this longing that Paul expresses. He says, "our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ," future tense coming up here, "who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself." A future perfection coming while in this present life there is an ambition that is engendered in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

So what happens after a man is justified? Well, it's glorious and this reflects the two part aspect of our message today: you grow in sanctification and that ends in glorification. Sanctification and glorification. Paul in verse 9 has given us a principle of justification, how we are declared righteous by God, now in verse 10, he's going to speak in a concentrated condensed form about the desires of sanctification, and then in verse 11, he's looking forward to glorification and that's what we want to see as we go through this text, oh, so too quickly here this morning.

So let's look, first of all, at verse 10 and if you're taking notes, you can call this point the growth of sanctification. The growth of sanctification, and having said that, let me just say this and especially for those of you that are either new Christians, this, I think, will be a great encouragement to you, or if you're new to Bible teaching, to understand of what's being described here. It is high and it is lofty. These themes of desiring to grow in Christ, to grow in sanctification and anticipating the goal of glorification, these themes are the noble ambition of the Christian life. These are the things that matter. These are the things that are preeminent. This is priority 1 and there is nothing in places 2 through 10. There is this preoccupation with Christ. There is this preoccupation with knowing him better, and there is this preoccupation with the anticipation of one day seeing him face-to-face, and this becomes the defining ambition of the Christian life. That's why we've titled today's message "Noble Ambition." Yes, we live in the world and we go through life with work and family and all of those issues, but they are not an end in themselves. The things of earthly life are not an end in themselves and they're not the preoccupation of our mind.

There was a reason why I opened the service today by reading from Colossians 3:1-4. Go back there with me. This is a letter that Paul wrote in approximately the same period of time that he wrote the book of Philippians as he wrote from the Roman cell that he was being kept in, and in Colossians 3, Paul is talking about with different terms but he's expressing the same theme about the noble ambition of the Christian life and what it is that we set our hearts on, what it is that we hope in, what it is that we want out of life. And so he says in Colossians 3, beginning in verse 1 there, he says, "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at

the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth."

So, as we take a little breath here, to breathe in the atmosphere of Scripture, so to speak, we see what aspirations it is that define a truly Christian heart and these are things that the unsaved man is not familiar with. These are things that many religious people know nothing about truly with power in their own heart, and yet Paul is expressing them as the essence of true Christianity. It's incredible. So let's just go through these two themes today, the growth of sanctification and the goal of glorification, all too quickly in our exposition here today.

The growth of sanctification, point 1. Sanctification, to define it simply not technically, is the progressive spiritual growth of a true Christian. It's something that God does in our hearts and it is something that we also pursue with the effort of our lives. In sanctification, the Christian dies increasingly to sin and grows in the righteousness of Christ. You set aside, you put aside, you lay aside the things of the flesh, the carnality of the world and the carnality of your prior life. It increasingly becomes distasteful to you and, by contrast, the things of Christ and knowing Christ and his work in your heart become far more important to you and in sanctification, God increasingly conforms us to be more and more like Christ as time goes on. Over the course of time, you know, from the point of your conversion, 5 years, 10 years, 20 years, 30 years down the line there is this growth, sometimes moving forward, sometimes receding back, but over time there is this direction of spiritual growth of becoming like the Lord Jesus Christ so that we can say as one writer said, I don't have the source for the quote, but we can say, "I'm not all that I should be and I'm not all that I will be, but praise God, I am not what I was."

Now look, look, if you are a Christian and you're honest with yourself, you're like me, I thoroughly completely understand that I'm not all the man that I should be in Christ right now. It grieves my heart that I still fall short of the glory of God like that, but that is not the defining aspect of the Christian. The defining aspect of the Christian is that God is changing us and sanctifying us and making us more like Christ so that we're not at all like we were before our conversion, and as time goes on there is spiritual growth that is evident in our lives over the course of time and, yes, yes, we're not yet perfect, we're not yet glorified but there is this evident aspect of the work of Christ in our lives and we love that and that's what we want, and we want more and more of it. That's what Paul's saying here, "I want to know Him." So what Paul is saying is that he wanted, if I can use theological terms to describe the essence of what he's saying here, he wants his justification of verse 9 to produce sanctification in him in verse 10.

So look at verse 10 with me again and we'll just comment on it briefly. He says in verse 10, having said in verse 9, "I want to be found in Him," he says in verse 10,

10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;

Beloved, the true Christian, the one who is actually justified in Christ and by Christ wants to know these things. Listen, the word "know" has different connotations depending on how you express it, and the "know" that Paul is talking about here is not simply the acquisition of more mental facts, it's not simply that he wants to become more intelligent and more refined in the minutiae of theological jargon with no effect on his life. He's not simply wanting to become, as one of my friends put it recently, he's not simply looking to be a fact-checker as he listens to sermons, and to sit in judgment of what has been spoken and did he get this point right, and you know, did he say enough facts about this, all in a mental academic realm that is divorced from the desires and the emotions and the priorities of his heart. That's not what Paul's talking about here at all, and it's so important for you to understand what he is talking about. What he is talking about is that there is this deep desire in his heart for an experiential understanding of Christ, for Christ to have a transforming impact on him so that his life and his desire and his experience is increasingly identified with, patterned after, reflecting something of the spiritual life of Christ himself while he was on earth. He says, "I want to know Christ. I want to know the power of His resurrection. I want to know the fellowship of His sufferings." And beloved, it's just so vital for you to understand that this is more than, I'll repeat the phrase, this is more than a mental acquisition of facts. We are talking about a complete life transformation that enters into sympathetically with the experience of Christ. Paul is saying, "I want to be even further transformed in Christ and I want it to be personal. I want it for myself."

And hey, you know what? We're being candid and we're being forthright here this morning, why not just keep it? This is a great problem for children who are born into a Christian home. Whether you're young and preteen or a teenager or a young adult in a Christian home, this is another thing that causes me to lose sleep is that I lose sleep over people like that because it is so easy for you to accept an external morality and to just kind of acquire more knowledge without any desire or any taste of this kind of spiritual transformation that true Christianity produces, and all I can do is plead for the Holy Spirit to work in your hearts because I can't make you be like a true Christian, I can't make these desires take root in your heart, but what you find often in the next generation of Christians that come up, what you find is a creeping arrogance of, "I've heard this stuff before," and it shows up in a worldliness and a preoccupation with the things of the world rather than the things of the Spirit and it's just laughed off that you're not godly. It's just ignored as something that's not important to you. And I just want to tell you, as part of fulfilling my own responsibility before Christ as a pastor and as a preacher of the word of God, is that that's a place of great great danger, to know the truth externally but not to own it personally, and to become a skeptic, to become a scorners, to become a mocker of the very things that the home of your mother and father stand for and real Christianity never goes there. You see, real Christianity is expressed. This isn't just Paul, this is what true Christianity produces in the heart of one who's truly been born again, "I want to know Christ. I want to know the power of His resurrection. I want to know the fellowship of His sufferings." And yeah, I get animated. It's not because I'm upset or angry with anybody, I'm just, you know, I'm just concerned for the state of your soul.

What can we say about the Apostle Paul? The Apostle Paul, think about this, think back to his conversion in Acts 9 when he met the Lord on the road to Damascus and the Lord appeared to him in glory. Paul fell on his knees, "Who are You, Lord?" "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." This was one great phenomenal moment in human history and in the life of the Apostle Paul. Christ appeared to him personally, intervened as he was heading to Damascus in order to persecute the church of Christ. Jesus Christ appeared, stopped him in his tracks and he was converted in that very moment. Now in today's Christian culture, a guy would write a book about that, talk about his great experiences that he'd had. For Paul, he had that and he didn't want to rest on what his past experience was. He didn't want to rest on his laurels, so to speak. He was not satisfied with what had happened in the past and living off some kind of past experience. You know, and if anybody was going to do that, you know, if the Lord had appeared to you personally and struck you down by a vision of his glory, you know, that would be a pretty ripe candidate for somebody who'd say, "You know, I'm just going to keep thinking about that." Paul wouldn't have it. Paul didn't want it. That wasn't enough because he knew that there was more to know. He wants even more in his walk with Christ, in his union with Christ.

Now look, there's a personal way that we can all understand this. You meet somebody for the first time, maybe you think back to when you first met your spouse, a little spark there and light of interest and how engaging it was, you meet someone else that you find interesting, someone who charms you. Well, what happens after that initial exposure, that initial introduction? What happens? Well, in your heart you want to build on the acquaintance, don't you? You want to know more. "That was such a great conversation. I'd like to get together with that person again. I want to know him better. I want to know her better. I want to, you know, there's more to know there. There's more to drink from that well." And you desire more and you're not content with just that initial introduction.

Well, beloved, multiply that common human experience by infinity and you have something of what it is like for Christian conversion to produce a noble ambition for Christian growth. You know, you come to Christ, especially, you know, in your adult years, and your life is changed and that sweet joy of conversion comes upon you, and the word of God opens and explodes on your mind with all of its truth and transforming impact, and those blessed early days of conversion are so sweet. Well, if that's, you know, when that happens you want more. It's like drinking salt water. You know, I drink this water and it makes me thirsty for more and I just keep drinking it and it just makes me more and more thirsty. That's the way it is with a true knowledge of Christ. You know him and it makes you thirsty for more. You know him better, it makes you thirsty for more. That's how great and infinitely glorious he is. He satisfies the human heart completely and then he makes you want him even more.

That's what Paul's talking about here. "I want to know Him," and Scripture tells us, beloved, Scripture tells us that this is the mark of a true Christian. In Matthew 5:6 our Lord said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness," and it's describing an ongoing experience. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, "for they and they alone shall be satisfied." There's this desire. There's this ambition. There is this priority,

wanting to know Christ and to know him better. And so, you know, I just have to stop and ask you whether that's in your heart or not because this is what true Christianity is. It's not about preeminently and primarily or only just showing up on Sunday and for some occasionally on Tuesday, we're talking about the whole reason that you exist and what you understand and what you want out of life.

And Paul goes on to explain the active force in sanctification. What is it that drives that? He says, "I want to know Him and the power of His resurrection." Power, you could say, is the ability to overcome resistance, the ability to overcome obstacles, the power to conquer, you might say. What Paul is saying is he wants to know the power of the resurrection in a way that overcomes any obstacles or any hindrances that would keep him from knowing Christ the way that he desires. He wants to know that power of the resurrection.

Look over at the book of Ephesians. Turn back a couple of pages to Ephesians 1. This book also, like Colossians and like Philippians, written at approximately the same time, the same season of life by the Apostle Paul and so it helps us understand something about what he has in mind as he talks about these glories that have been revealed to us. So in Ephesians 1:18, he talks about the power of the resurrection to help us conquer sin. He says in verse 18, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe." And what is this power? It's "in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead," resurrection, "and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come." Power, laying the foundation for what would come in the later chapters of Ephesians about transformation in the daily life.

Look at chapter 2. In other words, power for sanctification, what else did this resurrection do for us? Ephesians 2:4. The resurrection of Christ is the power behind our regeneration, the power behind our new birth. Verse 4, "God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Resurrection power being the driving engine, being that which supplies the power for a man or a woman to be born again. Resurrection power being that which provides the transforming impact of sanctification once a man is saved. All rooted in the power of God, the power of Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit as expressed supremely in the resurrection of Christ. Do you know anybody that's raised themselves from the dead? Not a one. No one has that power. This is supernatural. This is something that God alone must do and can only do.

So what Paul is saying as he speaks about this power of the resurrection is, "I want to know in an experiential personal way the God that has power like that, and I want that power to be unleashed to change me and sanctify me even further in my Christian life." And it goes on. Keep going back to 1 Corinthians 15. The centrality of the resurrection to

the Christian faith can never be overstated. A man could spend 50 years preaching only on this theme and not exhaust it and not give too much emphasis to it. In 1 Corinthians 15:20, the resurrection of Christ guarantees the future resurrection of the believer. Verse 20, "But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead." Watch this, "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive." Looking to the future, one day, Christian brother, Christian sister, we will be bodily raised from the dead. We will be with Christ and be like him not only in the spiritual aspect of his resurrection but with a body like his after his own resurrection. I don't know what all the details of that's going to be like, I just know this for sure: it's going to be glorious and it's going to be better than anything I can think.

And Paul says, "Think about it." What Paul's saying here in Philippians 3 is that God has done all of this for us, regeneration, justification, sanctification, ultimate glorification, all of it premised on the power of the resurrection of Christ, he says, "This is so far greater than anything on earth." Earlier in Philippians 3 he says, "I count all things to be loss for the sake of Christ. Everything about my earthly righteousness, everything about my earthly life, it's lost. It's a liability by comparison to the asset of having Christ and knowing him." And as a result of understanding that, as a result of that being in his heart by the power of the Holy Spirit, Paul says, "These things of earth grow strangely dim in the light of the glory of his grace, in light of the power of his resurrection. This is the preoccupation of my life ambition going forward." For his people in his death, burial and resurrection, Christ won victory over sin, over death, over Satan, over hell, and all of these things are so magnificently glorious, Paul says, "That's what I want to know. I want more of that. I want it more animated in my heart and I want it to more and more control my thinking." Union with Christ gives us resurrection power over sin, death and Satan himself.

And there's another aspect of this sanctification of which Paul desires. Look at it there in verse 10, he says, "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings." The word "fellowship" in this context has the idea of an honored partnership with Christ in the sufferings of Christ. You see, my friend, when God saves us, when Christ makes us his own, he does something that affects not only us but the world around us. Whereas before we were in the world and we were of the world and we walked according to the world, according to the lust of the flesh, the boastful pride of life, Christ when he saves us takes us out of that realm and puts us in the realm of his kingdom. Well, friends, let me ask you this just in a very basic sense: what did the world do when they had Christ in their hands? They killed him. They crucified him. They contradicted him. They reproached him. They persecuted him. Christ suffered at the hands of the world. He literally suffered in his physical body at their hands. And Jesus said in John 15:20, "You know, if they persecuted Me, they'll persecute you too." And what Paul is saying is, "I embrace that. If the world hated Christ, I embrace suffering at the hands of the world just so that I can be in an honored partnership with the One who loved me and gave Himself up for me."

Everything about what Paul is saying here, every aspect of it is a complete contradiction of the moralistic therapeutic deism that animates the pulpits of the majority of so-called evangelical churches today. God loves you. He's going to make life easy for you. Call on him, he'll fix your problem and then he'll get out of the way and let you get back to what you're doing. Paul would have nothing to do with a theory, with a religion like that. Paul would have nothing to do with a religion that said, "I'll exempt you from everything of suffering in your life." Paul contradicts the whole spirit of all of that, which we taught about a couple of years ago, you can look it up online. He says, "I embrace, I want the fellowship of His suffering. That's what I want. I want to be identified with Him and I want to enter into the experience of what it was like for Christ in His suffering."

My friends, for us to be in Christ, to be truly in Christ is to be put into the relationship that Christ had with the world, and it was a relationship of hostility which the world directed against Christ even though Christ loved the world and was giving himself for it. Unrequited love. Hostility. Evil in return for the good that Christ offered and spoke to them. Paul says, "I'll take that. If it will put me into a closer experiential walk with Christ, I'll take that. That's what I want in life." In other words, you could put it this way. Paul gladly accepted, he sought the cross as well as the crown. The instrument of suffering for Christ, he said, you know, "If you want to follow after Me, take up your cross, follow after Me." It's part of the deal. It's part of what real Christianity is. To leave that out is to teach a false gospel, a false religion, even done in the name of Christ. There is no Christianity without the cross. There is no cross without suffering and Paul says, "I embrace that. I want to be in honored partnership with Him."

Look back at Matthew 5 again. Matthew 5:10, Jesus says that this is an aspect of Christian life, of being his disciple. Chapter 5, verse 10, he says, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Theirs and theirs alone is the sense of it. Verse 11, "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." The Apostle Paul in his sufferings and in the persecutions joined in that statement of Christ which was made before the conversion of the Apostle Paul. There's this partnership, there's this noble sharing in the suffering of Christ and those that have followed him in the centuries that have gone before us and Paul says, "It's a privilege. I desire that. I want to be intimate with Christ, including the experience of suffering for the sake of righteousness just like my Lord did." Maybe it comes, maybe it doesn't, that's in the hand of the Lord. Paul's ambition is, "I'm willing to share in it." Ultimately it cost him his head.

Go back to Philippians 3. Philippians 3 he says there at the end of verse 10, "I want to know Him, the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death," indicating a process of being conformed to his death and in his inner man being conformed in that way, Christ died for sin, believers die to sin. So what Paul is expressing here is that in sanctification a Christian increasingly grows by the power of the resurrection and he says, "That's what I want. While God gives me breath here on earth, that's what I want."

I ask you, my friends, whether you know or whether something like that moves in your heart or not. If this is utterly foreign to you, if you don't know this, you've never known this and you can't understand why I get animated talking about it, then maybe you haven't been born again. Maybe you need to ask Christ to open your eyes, say, "I must be missing something here. All of this is foreign to me. I'm cold. I mock these things, Lord. What must be the state of my soul if I'm so cold and indifferent to the things that Paul said pulsed in him and made his heart beat? How could I be with Paul and with Christ if that's all foreign to me?"

But there's even more glory that Paul desired and that brings us to our second point for this morning: the goal of glorification. The goal of glorification. Paul says, "I want this sanctifying impact of the power of resurrection on my life," verse 11,

11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Christian friend, even if these have sometimes lain dormant in your soul but you find them being reinvigorated, take courage, take heart, be encouraged by the fact that your heart is responding to these things even if you strayed from them. It's an indication that the work of God is not yet dead in your soul. If you're a true Christian, the word of God will never be dead in your soul because he saves everybody that he justifies. He perfects the work that he begun, but what Paul is doing here in verse 11, he's looking ahead to the bodily resurrection of believers. What Paul does here is he's saying, "I want this sanctifying work in me now during my earthly life, and I want the ultimate end product of that which is the bodily resurrection." Paul accepts suffering now for the sake of the eternal life that is going to be revealed to him in the end.

Now Paul did not know exactly when or how he would die at this point. His life was uncertain as he was awaiting his audience with Caesar's court, but here's the thing, my friends: by whatever means it took, Paul says, "I want to be there. That's my ultimate destination. That's my goal. That's what I care most about. I want to be in that number that is resurrected with Christ from the dead at His coming." His eye is fixed on the bodily resurrection from the dead and in that transformation that God is going to give to each one of us that are true Christians, in that transformation we are going to be set free from sin, set free from bodily disintegration. We are going to be set free from earthly sorrow. We are going to be set free from the specter of impending death. All of it is going to be taken away in the resurrection. Christ having been raised once is never to die again. Christ perfected in glory according to his eternal nature, we are going to be swept up and identified with that exact same kind of experience. We will not be made God but we will be made perfect, and we will have a body fit to live in heaven forever, not subject to sin and temptation, no more memories of our prior wicked life to haunt us, no more hostility from the world to discourage and cause us to stumble, no more false philosophies to refute, all of the other things that make life on this earth so often difficult and wearisome, it's all going to be gone, replaced with that great vision, the great presence of Christ with him, accepted by him, him loving us, blessing us, welcoming us into his presence and us joining with saints throughout the ages in returning honor and giving glory to him, and

flinging our crowns like a Frisbee at his feet. Paul says, "That's what I want. That's my ambition. That's what I'm after. That is the goal of my heart." That's the noble ambition, the goal of glorification, the ultimate outcome.

You know, these false prophets of moralistic therapeutic deism with all of their earth-centered approach and earth-centered teaching on this pseudo-Christianity that they teach, they put blinders on people and they say, "Just look at the here-and-now. Look at what you want now and God will help you with what you want now." You know what? I don't want you to think about the here-and-now. Look beyond. Look to the glorious, the glorious vision of heaven that awaits us and set your heart there like Colossians 3 told us to do. Your life is hid with Christ. Seek the things above, not the things on the earth. That's not diminishing the importance of earthly life, that's giving the one thing to earthly life that makes it worth living and that enables us to persevere because the process of sanctification comes with its setbacks. We have conflict with the world, with the devil, with self, sometimes with each other, and it gets kind of wearying, doesn't it?

What Paul shows us by his example here in these inspired words of Scripture, he shows us to keep our eyes on the prize. Though it may be veiled, we may see it only darkly in the moment, beloved, if you are in Christ, resurrection power is at work in you to guarantee that you will enter into this goal of glorification. You will not miss it. God is making sure that your life arrives at that destination if you are in Christ, and so one day as we saw at the end of chapter 3 here in Philippians, one day we will be raised from the dead and given new bodies. In that state, we will be free from sin, we will be like Christ, 1 John 3:2, because we will see him as he is. Justification leads to sanctification leads to glorification.

So what do we do with this noble ambition? Martyn Lloyd-Jones said it well. I quote him a lot, I ought to quote him more than I do. It's good to quote better men than you, meaning myself, not you, but better men than me is what I mean by that. Here's what the great doctor said. He said, "Christ lived the perfect life. He died the atoning death. He was buried in a grave. He has risen and entered glory. All who are in Christ are certain of the same glory. The extent to which we realize this is the extent to which we shall know what it is to long for it, and to say that everything else is rubbish by comparison. What is the world and all its glories when I think of that other glory?" He continues, "Therefore my ambition is that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead and an entry into that glory."

My friend, do you know Jesus Christ in the manner of which we've been speaking here today? Does the noble ambition animate your heart and life?

Let's pray.

Father, we can only faintly remotely imagine how wonderful it will be to be in heaven with Christ with perfection and glorified bodies. We can only imagine what that would be like, how wonderful it will be when it's so wonderful to just contemplate it based on Your word and the help of Your Spirit in our hearts here on this earth. Thank You for all that

You've done for Your people. Thank You for causing us to be born again. Thank You for the perfect gift of justification in Christ received by faith alone. Thank You for Your work of sanctification in our hearts. May You ever increase it more in each one of us. Thank You for the outcome of glorification and the wonder and the splendor that will be to be with saints throughout the ages, to be with Christians that have gone before us into glory, all of that eclipsed by being in the presence of our dear Lord Jesus. May it be true for each one, Father. May You help those who have been convicted today. Father, may You give their spirit no rest until they humble themselves at the cross of Christ. May You give Your restless people a satisfaction in Christ and a peace that surpasses all understanding, knowing that it is well with our souls for our souls are in Christ and this Christ loved us, gave Himself for us, and will keep us unto glory. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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