

The Surpassing Value of Knowing Christ, Part 1

Philippians 3:7-8

Introduction

I have no doubt that the overwhelming majority of you have heard and read about the Supreme Court ruling that was issued this past Friday. The highest court in our land, in an unconstitutional display of judicial activism, has circumvented the democratic process and issued a mandate to all 50 states to fundamentally redefine marriage, effectively shaking their fist at their Creator, and the Creator of marriage.

It was a ruling that should have come as a surprise to nobody. Our society has been racing through the checkpoints of immorality at breakneck speed for quite some time now. But I confess to you that when I heard of the decision—and saw the rainbow lights on the White House, and saw how a nation as great as ours has been is virtually celebrating its own destruction—I was affected by that. Probably like many of you, I was filled with a sense of mourning and lamentation—an affection that’s captured by the psalmist, as he observes the godlessness of his own nation, and says, Psalm 119:136: “My eyes shed streams of water, Because they do not keep Your law.”

But though we rightly mourn over the condemnation that our country is heaping upon itself, we as the people of God have no cause to be disheartened. The kings of the earth will take their stand, and the rulers will take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed. But, Psalm 2 says, He who sits in the heavens laughs, and even scoffs at them. The response of the Almighty God of the universe to the rulers of the free world that would take counsel against Him is, Psalm 2 verse 6: “But as for Me, I have installed My King Upon Zion.” King Jesus is still on His throne.

And we have to remember that institutional homosexuality is not merely a sign of the *coming* wrath of God against a nation. Romans 1 tells us that institutional homosexuality is the evidence of the wrath of God *already exercised* upon a nation. Friday’s ruling itself *is* the judgment of God upon America. And that means that Christ was no more defeated by that decision than a judge is defeated when he passes a sentence of condemnation on a guilty criminal. And so we as Christians don’t mourn over this ruling because we’ve been defeated. God has installed His King, and Jesus has not moved from His throne. No, we mourn over this ruling because of our compassion for a people who insists on robbing themselves of eternal joy, and vigorously pursuing eternal destruction.

And we must remember, Grace Church, that it is into that society that we are sent to proclaim rescue from such destruction through repentance and faith in Christ. In a letter to the alumni of The Master's Seminary regarding this issue, our Pastor, John MacArthur, wrote: If our society is experiencing the *judgment* of Romans 1, "then we must follow the *prescription* found in Romans 1: We are not ashamed of the *Gospel*, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." We must unashamedly, and unrelentingly, proclaim the Good News of salvation from sin and destruction through repentance and faith in Christ Jesus alone.

The great need of the hour is for the Church of Jesus Christ to truly be a Gospel-people—a people who *preach* the Gospel of Christ, and a people who are *shaped* by that Gospel in every aspect of our lives. This is what our identity needs to be built upon. And of course, there will be challenges to that identity. A country that is willing to violate the liberties of state legislatures will not long have misgivings about violating the religious liberties of Christians who do not conform to its orthodoxy of immorality. Pastor John also wrote in that letter, that "the new normal may include persecution that is new to us." And so whether it's just the continued scorn of the world—accusations of "bigotry" and "hatred"—or whether this persecution will have some legal teeth to it, your commitment to Christ and His Word *will* be tested. There *will* be temptations to compromise. And it is only insofar as you are soundly rooted and grounded in the Gospel itself, that you will be able to withstand those temptations.

And because of that, both this morning and next Lord's Day, I want to preach through a passage of Scripture that Martyn Lloyd-Jones calls "one of the most eloquent statements of what it really means to be a Christian" (*Life of Peace*, 45). Another commentator writes, "Paul, no doubt, would have been the first to protest that the gospel he proclaimed is too rich to be reduced to a few sentences. But if such a feat could be accomplished, the passage before us would be it" (Silva, 155). The passage I'm speaking about is Philippians chapter 3, verses 7 through 11.

In Philippians 3, the Apostle Paul is warning the church at Philippi against the false teaching of the Judaizers, who are teaching that salvation comes through faith in Jesus *plus* one's own obedience to the law. And because this teaching fundamentally distorts what it means to be a true child of God, Paul outlines the nature of a true Christian. And he does that by giving a spiritual autobiography of sorts—by outlining God's dealings with him in his salvation as a way for the believers in Philippi to understand the theology of the Gospel. Let's read the text together: "But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.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." And we'll stop there for this morning.

And what we have here are **five facets of genuine saving faith**. In these two short verses, Paul displays the nature of true Christianity, and true conversion. This is the picture of the kind of

person who is grounded in the Gospel of Christ—one who is so satisfied in the surpassing value of knowing Jesus, that he is prepared to happily suffer the loss of all things so that he can gain Christ.

And as we behold these **five facets** of genuine saving faith—these **five marks** of the faith of true believers in Christ—it’s my prayer that you will, first of all, see these things to be true of you. And then, understanding the nature of the Gospel by which you are saved, my prayer is that you would be more *shaped* by that Gospel in your own character and affections, and therefore be better equipped to *preach* that Gospel to a nation that is hell-bent on destroying itself.

I. The Renunciation

And that first **facet of saving faith** I’m calling **the renunciation. The renunciation that genuine faith makes.** Paul said back in verse 3, that the true Christian “puts no confidence in the flesh.” But in verse 4 he says, “if anyone has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more.” “If anyone could make a case for deriving their righteousness from commandment-keeping, it’s me.” And in verses 5 and 6 he lists seven religious advantages that he had trusted in for righteousness before he met Christ. (1) He says he was circumcised on the eighth day, and so he trusted in his religious ritualism. (2) He was of the nation of Israel, not merely a proselyte like many of the Judaizers. And so he trusted in his heritage. (3) He was of the tribe of Benjamin, able to trace his descent to one of the most highly regarded tribes in Israel. And so he trusted in his high social standing. (4) He was a Hebrew *of* Hebrews. His parents were sure to maintain their traditional Jewish customs over against the pagan influences of Greco-Roman culture. And so he trusted in his religious traditions. (5) With respect to the law, he was a Pharisee—a member of the strictest, most fastidious sect of Judaism. And so he trusted in his religious devotion. (6) He was so sincerely zealous for the purity of Judaism that he *killed* Christians.” And so he trusted in his religious sincerity for acceptance with God. (7) And finally, he says, “as to the righteousness which is in the law, I was found blameless.” And so he trusted in his own self-righteousness.

But in verse 7, he says, “But whatever things were *gains* to me, those things I have counted as *loss* for the sake of Christ!” And here Paul takes up the language of accounting and mathematics. He pictures himself as an accountant with his ledger book opened up in front of him. And he says, “In the past as I reflected on my life and all my fleshly advantages—my ritualism, my heritage, my social standing, my traditionalism, my religious devotion, my zeal, my self-righteousness—I listed all those advantages out in my ledger book, and do you know what I saw next to each one of them? Pluses. Every one of these advantages were written in black ink in the “Assets” column. And as I contemplated the day that I would eventually stand in judgment before the Holy God of Israel, oh my heart trusted and rested so securely in the fact that I had a ledger full of pluses! Full of assets! Full of *gains*!”

But now he says, “*Whatever things* that were gains to me—whether it was those seven advantages, or any other advantages that you can think of—those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ!” While he was still on his way to beat and imprison and murder more Christians, the Lord Jesus Himself appeared from Heaven in a blazing light, knocked Paul straight to the ground, and struck him blind! And though he couldn’t see with his physical eyes, the eyes of his *heart* were opened for the very first time, and he could finally see the glory of this Jesus whom he had been persecuting!

And in that moment, in the light of that glory, he saw himself as he truly appeared before God, in all the filth of sin and uncleanness. He looked again upon that ledger book of his, with the list of all his religious credits. And he says, “All the pluses disappeared.” Every fleshly advantage that he had written in the “Assets” column had been moved to the “Liabilities” column! All the black ink turned into red ink! Everything he counted as gains added up to one colossal loss!

The word for “loss,” there, speaks of a detriment, of damage, of forfeit. The only other place this particular word is used as a noun in the New Testament is in Acts 27, as Paul suffers shipwreck on his voyage to Rome. They had been battling a volatile sea for several days. And Luke says in Acts 27:18, “The next day as we were being violently storm-tossed, they began to jettison the cargo.” Verse 38 tells us that the men sought to “lighten the ship by throwing out the wheat into the sea.” What had happened? The cargo on that ship set for Italy was at one time considered to be *gain* for the merchants. But when those men came to the realization that that cargo was standing between them and life, they didn’t just count it as worthless. They counted it as loss—as positively harmful to them—and they cast it into the sea!

And friends when Paul realized that everything in his life that he had counted on to be *gain* stood between him and the *life* that is to be found in Jesus Christ and in Him alone, Paul counted everything that he might have put his confidence in for righteousness—everything that he ever considered himself to be—not just as worthless, but as loss, and chucked it overboard into the sea, happy to never to see it again!

This is the **renunciation** that saving faith makes. This is what salvation *is*. What it means to be converted, is to list out all of the things that you put your confidence in to earn your acceptance before God—all the things that you counted as gains: your inherited privileges, your natural talents, your obedience, your deeds of compassion, your educational and professional achievements, your church attendance and Bible reading and prayer time—and to **renounce** them: to count them all as one huge loss. It means abandoning all trust and reliance upon yourself for your righteousness—that’s repentance—, and then turning to Christ and trusting *Him* to provide that righteousness in your place—that’s faith. So much more than simply believing that certain facts *about* Jesus and His Gospel are true, saving faith is trusting *in* Jesus to

provide the righteousness that you need to enter into the presence of the Holy God of the universe.

Dear friends, have you seen Him? Has the beautiful, ravishing sight of Christ's glory that shone across the pages of Paul's ledger book taken *your* heart captive? Has the loveliness of His righteousness caused you to look at your own righteousness and count it as loss—as the heavy cargo that will sink your soul into the sea of eternal punishment? Has there been this radical disruption of the very center of your life, the very core of your being? Have you **renounced** everything that might compete with Christ for your allegiance—every conceivable rival to your total trust in Christ for righteousness?

That is what it means to be a Christian, friends. That is the faith we speak about when we preach that salvation is through faith in Jesus alone. That is what you're calling people to when you preach the Gospel to them! "Believing in Jesus" is not just a confession you make with your lips. Not just a mental assent to certain facts of history. But abandoning all trust and reliance upon yourself for your righteousness—even in part—and entirely depending upon the doing and the dying of Another to take you to Heaven.

II. The Resilience

There's a **second facet** of genuine saving faith that we see in this passage. Not only is there the renunciation. There's also, **number two: the resilience**. The **resilience** of saving faith.

We've just described Paul as coming to view trusting in his own inherited privileges and his own religious achievements as loss for the sake of Christ—viewing them as heavy cargo on a sinking ship that would only drown him if he clung to them. And so in the light of the glory of Christ, he counted them as worthless, and happily chucked them overboard into the tumultuous sea. But now it's as if Paul anticipates someone coming to him and saying, "Now Paul, that was certainly a traumatic, emotional experience you had on the Damascus road there. I mean, blazing light! voices from heaven! physical blindness! That would put anyone in an emotional state where they would make hasty decisions! And Paul, that was 30 solid years ago. And you had so much to lose; after all, if anyone had a reason to put confidence in the flesh, you had far more! Paul, do you have any regrets? Do you have any second thoughts about throwing all of your self-righteousness overboard?"

And Paul says, "Not at all. Not only *have* I counted all my grounds for confidence before God as loss, in the past, but," verse 8, "More than that, 30 years later, I do presently go on counting all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."

So Paul's 30 year-old decision to throw all of his self-righteousness overboard was not an impulsive, rash decision made in the heat of a passionate moment. It wasn't a decision where, after the commotion died down, he began to question himself and regret it. To extend the metaphor, it's not as if, after throwing his self-righteousness overboard while he was in the tumult of the storm, and then coming to safety on a nearby island—it's not as if he's sitting on the beach, forlorn, gazing out into the horizon, nostalgically mourning his lost treasure that now lays on the ocean floor. 30 years later, in a calm and settled frame of mind, Paul tells us that his present evaluation of all he once trusted in for righteousness is the same as it was that day on the Damascus road. The deliberate, considered judgment of his heart, based on the careful weighing of the facts (cf. Hendriksen, 161n139), is that all his self-righteousness is still one, overwhelming, loss.

This is the **resilience** of saving faith. Genuine, God-given, saving faith is not an impulsive, emotionally-induced, one-time decision that has no effect on a person's life after the passion of that moment is over. How many professing believers there are who point to a revival service, or a Billy Graham crusade, or a mountaintop experience while they were on some sort of retreat where they "made a decision for Jesus"—how many people claim such things as the reason they believe they're saved! One day, long ago, they had an "encounter" with Jesus. But you look at their lives 5, 10, 20, 30 years later, and you realize that they've not gone on counting all things as loss for Jesus' sake. They've begun again to trust in their own righteousness and to pursue their sin, and so they show that whatever experience or whatever faith they had wasn't marked by the **resilience** of genuine *saving* faith.

This is the great doctrine of the perseverance of the saints—that those who are truly saints, those whose faith is truly genuine, will persevere in that faith. Jesus said it plainly in Matthew 24:13: "The one who endures to the end, he will be saved." And again in John 8:31, He says, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine." You say, "Well, wait a minute. There are plenty of people I know who grew up in the church, were baptized, read their Bibles and prayed, who've walked away from Christ. What about them?" The Apostle John answers that question in 1 John 2:19: "They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us." They may have professed to have been of us—that is to say, they may have professed to be true believers—but by not persevering to the end, they gave evidence by their going out from us that they were never truly marked by the **resilience** of genuine saving faith. They were never true believers to begin with.

Dear friends, is your trust in Christ marked by grace-induced **resilience**? Can you honestly testify that your conversion—your initial commitment to Jesus—was not just an impulsive, in-the-heat-of-the-moment, whimsical emotional decision that has no present effect on your heart or the way you navigate your daily life? Can you exclaim with Paul that you not only *have* counted

all things as loss, but do now, at this present hour, count all things as loss for the sake of knowing Christ?

Brothers and sisters, the Enemy of your souls has an entire world full of allies who would all love nothing more than to see you beaten down into hateful silence—than for you to be ashamed of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Word, than for you to compromise in your commitment to Him, and eventually for you to turn your back on Him, and to return like a dog to its vomit to friendship with and conformity to the world. Dear people, by the grace of God, don't give in to those pressures! Stand firm in the grace of God! Pray with all your might that He would grant you the **resilience** of saving faith that marks the true follower of Christ.

III. The Reality

Now you'd think that between verse 7 and the first part of verse 8 Paul would be satisfied he's made his point. But he's not! He keeps right on repeating himself—and not just repeating himself but intensifying and escalating! Look again at verse 8: “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.”

And here we behold our **third facet**: namely, **the reality. The reality that faith confronts**. So far we've been speaking of the disposition of the mind and heart that regards or esteems or counts certain privileges and attainments to be worth less than nothing to us. We've been saying that saving faith *counts* all things to be loss. But Paul tells us here that this hasn't just been theoretical for him. It certainly has had to do with the resolution of his mind and the disposition of his affections. But here he's telling us that he has *actually* suffered the loss of all things.

You say, “What did he lose?” Well, not only did he lose all fleshly grounds of confidence in himself and in his religious credentials to take him to heaven. He also lost everything in life that he would have enjoyed if he continued to trust in those things for righteousness. Don't forget the exalted position that the Apostle Paul enjoyed in his life in Judaism. He was an educated man. He sat at the feet of the rabbi Gamaliel, who according to Acts 5:34 was highly respected by all in Jerusalem. He was at the top of his class in his religious and educational studies; he says in Galatians 1:14, “I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen.” In fact, we learn in Acts 7:58 that even as a young man, Saul of Tarsus was supervising the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Later, in Acts 23 verse 6, Paul tells the crowd that he was a Pharisee and a *son* of Pharisees. And so he and his family were among the religious elite and were therefore likely to have been financially well-off. Paul would have had a respected place in the religious community, a sure income, a comfortable living; he would have had property and inheritance; and he would have had nothing but the best kind of company that was suitable to complement a formidable intellect like his.

But when He beheld the risen Christ on the Damascus road and abandoned all confidence in himself and his own religious performance, he wasn't only abandoning the religious soteriology of Judaism. He was abandoning all the privileges that he enjoyed as a respected member of Jewish society. We have every reason to believe that Paul was disowned by his family, that he was disinherited, that whatever property he did own was summarily confiscated; rather than a comfortable lifestyle with an upper-class income, he had to labor all of his life, working with his hands as a tentmaker.

I think 1 Corinthians 4 gives us an idea of what Paul lost for his commitment to Christ. Turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 4. In verses 9 and 10 he says that he's a spectacle to the world, regarded as a fool, weak, and without honor. Then, verse 11: "To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things."

"The scum of the world," and "the dregs of all things." That's who we are, friends. You see, Christians are people who have not only had to abandon confidence in our own goodness to take us to heaven—not only had to forsake our religion, and amend our thinking on how we hope to get to heaven. True Christians are those who have come face to face with the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus, and who are therefore willing to suffer the loss of all things—if God should will it so—to become the scum of the earth—and to count it *gain*, because we gain Christ! It is to be so satisfied in knowing Jesus, that we gladly go out to Him—as Hebrews 13 says—outside the camp, bearing His reproach, because we gain *Him*. That is what Paul says it means to be a true Christian! True, saving faith receives Christ not only as *righteousness*; saving faith also receives Christ as *treasure*! As the One whom we *worship* and *value* above all things!

Our culture is giving us every indication that our commitment to Christ will not remain merely theoretical for very much longer. Dear brothers and sisters, are you prepared to face **the reality that true faith confronts**? Are you prepared to suffer the loss of all things and count them but refuse for the sake of gaining Christ? Are you prepared to show the world that Christ is more satisfying than all that life can offer, and all that death can take? Are we, like Paul, prepared to count money as loss, to count possessions as loss, to count reputation as loss, to count comfort as loss, to count an easy, conflict-free life as loss, to count even family as loss for the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord? Is Christ of such value to you—has He so captivated your heart—that you're prepared to lose everything this life has to offer because of your commitment to Him, and call that loss *gain*?

IV. The Revulsion

Paul says, “I’ve suffered the loss of *all* things.” And with the false doctrine of the Judaizers in their ears, and the false pleasures of the world in their eyes, the Philippians want to know, “Paul, do you have any regrets? Do you wish you could have it all back?” And he says, “Oh my dear Philippians, I count it all as *garbage*! Not only do I not wish to have it back; I am absolutely **repulsed** by it all! When I think that a generous income, social respectability, a comfortable life, and even family blessings could have come between me and my dear Lord Jesus, I am absolutely sickened by all those things, and I count them as worth nothing more than refuse in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord!” And this, friends, is the **fourth facet of saving faith** that we see in this passage: **the revulsion of faith**. You see, saving faith not only renounces all the idols in which we place our trust and seek our satisfaction; it is **repulsed** by them.

This word, *skubalon*, that the NAS translates as *rubbish* has always been a difficult word for the translators to agree upon. There are basically two categories of thought on this. There is linguistic evidence that bears witness to the word referring to excrement or manure. The King James Version represents this view and translates the word as dung. But there is also linguistic evidence that testifies that the word referred to kitchen scraps left after a meal, to food that had rotted, to garbage. Most of the modern translations follow this view and render the word rubbish (NASB, ESV, NKJV, NIV), refuse (ASV), or filth (HCSB). I lean toward this latter category of meaning—of garbage or refuse—not because I think *excrement* is too strong a rendering; I actually don’t think you could *render* this word too strongly. But I believe the idea is refuse, because the word *skubalon* derives from a Greek phrase that means, “that which is thrown to the dogs” (TDNT).

Now, dogs, in the Greco-Roman culture, were a far cry from man’s best friend. In that society, dogs were scavengers who would roam the streets of the ancient world eating anything and everything that they could get their mangy mouths on: dead animals, dead humans, and—if they could find it—even the rotting garbage that was left over from a recent meal. *Skubalon* denoted refuse, that which was fit only to be thrown to the dogs.

This is the true Christian’s estimation of all that the world around us treasures so highly. All of Paul’s inherited privileges, all of his religious achievements, and every worldly comfort that this life promised him—when he compared it with the surpassing value of knowing Christ, he regarded it as abominable trash, fit only to be thrown to the dogs. He says, “Apart from Jesus Christ, I count every rival source of *righteousness* and every rival source of *pleasure* as refuse.”

Friends, do you know something of the proper **revulsion** that true saving faith engenders toward all idols of the heart? Do you regard (a) all of the self-righteousness that you can achieve, as well as (b) all of the treasures this life can offer you—do you regard them all as refuse, as absolute

filth, in comparison to the surpassing value of knowing Christ? Or are you attracted to them? Do they have hooks in your heart? I mean, sure, you reject them because you know it's the right thing to do. But are you **repulsed** by them? You see, sin must be mortified not merely at the *fruit*-level, but at the *root*-level. And the root of all sin is the affections, the desires, the inclinations. Friends, saturate your eyes with the loveliness of the glory of Jesus—labor to get your heart so satisfied by Him—that you regard the world's temptations as something fit only to be thrown to the dogs.

V. The Reason

Well, we've seen the renunciation, the resilience, the reality, and the revulsion. We come, finally, to the **fifth facet of genuine saving faith** that Paul speaks of in this passage. And that is **the reason**.

And we've been saying this throughout the whole sermon because I couldn't resist. But now we're going to underscore it. How can Paul speak so strongly and resolutely about such things? *Why* does he count all things as loss? What is the cause for such a definitive negative evaluation of everything he might put his confidence in? What can cause someone to behold all the earthly glory of self-righteousness, possessions, money, property, reputation, status, comfort, ease, and ten thousand other things—and regard it as trash? There can only be one answer: **Knowing Jesus Christ**. He makes all the difference. Look with me again at verse 8: “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*.”

This “knowledge” of Christ that Paul speaks about having here is overwhelmingly *personal* and *relational*. It is so far beyond merely knowing certain truths *about* Jesus—it is that! But Paul is speaking of *so* much more. Listen to the way the commentators speak about this kind of knowledge:

- This kind of knowledge signifies “living in a close relationship with...somebody, such a relationship as to cause what may be called communion” (Bruce, 88).
- “...personal acquaintance...” (BDAG, 203)
- “...to know experientially by personal involvement” (MacArthur, 235)
- “...personal relational knowledge...” (MacArthur, 235)
- “...personal experience and intimate relationship” (Fee, 318)

Are you getting the picture?

Jesus Himself speaks of this tender, personal relationship in John 10:14 when He says, “I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, *even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father*.” You say, “By what kind of knowledge does the believer know Christ?”

Answer: by the same kind of personal, intimate, relational knowledge that God the Father knows Jesus and Jesus knows God the Father!

This is the experiential knowledge of relationship. This is that conscious communion that we have with Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit and through the means of the Word of God that makes us aware of the fact that we worship a real *Person*, and not just an invisible *idea*—that makes us feel (because it’s true!) that Jesus is our Friend, and our Comforter, and our Brother, and our Intercessor, and our Advocate. This so much more than knowing the facts of Jesus’ person—that He was God and man and was virgin-born and sinless and died on the cross to pay for sins and rose again. Can I put it simply? You recognize that there are a lot of people you know *about* that you don’t know *personally*. And Paul says: the true believer knows Jesus *personally*.

And he says that that personal, experiential knowledge of Christ—that is what makes him count all things as loss. Knowing Jesus is of surpassing value, of incomparable worth, of matchless worth. If you were to put the value of knowing Christ on a balance scale, and put everything else that Paul has spoken about on the other side—the self-righteousness, the religious prestige, the financial security, the comfortable life, the highly-regarded profession—all of that, in the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6)—all of it is just garbage! And so Paul says he regards all the pleasures of the world as refuse *so that*—in order that, with the purpose that—I may gain Christ. What’s the implication? If I have to regard every rival pleasure as refuse so that I may gain Christ, if I *don’t* regard every rival pleasure as refuse, and continue to nurture idols in my heart, will I gain Christ? No!

Paul had found the treasure hidden in a field, hadn’t he? He found the pearl of great price. Turn to Matthew chapter 13. In Matthew chapter 13 verses 44 to 46, the Lord Jesus Himself tells two parables that teach what *conversion is*. Jesus says, verse 44, “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and *from joy over it* he goes and *sells all that he has* and buys that field.” The man whose heart has been awakened by the miracle of regeneration is like a man who stumbles upon a priceless, buried treasure. And because of the surpassing value of the treasure that is Jesus Christ Himself, the man sells everything he has so he can buy that field. He counts everything he owns as garbage in comparison to the surpassing value of gaining this treasure!

Oh friends, was that Jesus to you at your conversion? Were you so thrilled by the surpassing greatness of His value that from the joy of discovering such a treasure, you gladly forsook all other pleasures in the world, counted them but dung, laid down your life, and laid hold of Christ? And not only, “*Was* that Jesus to you at your conversion,” but: *Is* that Jesus to you *now*? Paul says, “I *presently*, at this very hour, go on *counting* as loss all things that would keep me from single-minded devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ!” Do you count the pleasures and luxuries of

this fallen world as nothing but refuse so that on that last day, you will prove to have truly been His disciple, and therefore gain *Him*?

That is the nature of true and genuine saving faith. It is faith that receives Christ alone for *righteousness*, and it is a faith that receives Christ alone for *satisfaction* and for *worship*.

Conclusion

Dear friends, **do you know Him?** Not just truths *about* Him. Not just Bible teaching *about* Him. Not just the theology of His incarnation or of His salvation or of His resurrection and ascension. Do you know *Him*? Do you know Him like you know your spouse? Or your parents? Or your children? Is He yours? Do you have the deep, intimate, personal communion with Him day by day? Do you cultivate your relationship with Him through the reading of His Word and through prayer, through the fellowship of God's people, and through abiding in His commandments?

Some of you, if you answer honestly, have to answer, "No," to those questions. Whatever may have been your past confession and your past experience, your faith has not had the resilience that continues to count all grounds of self-confidence as loss. You have not experienced the revulsion—both of your own sin and of your own righteousness—which characterizes saving faith. You don't count all worldly pleasures and comforts to be loss in view of the surpassing value of Christ. Christ doesn't look valuable at all to you. He looks like a burdensome taskmaster who spoils all your fun.

Oh, my friend, all I can do is plead with you to see the foolishness of your own heart, and—by the power of the Holy Spirit through the means of the Word of God—to look afresh and see the glory and the beauty and the worth and the righteousness of Jesus. Who would stumble upon a priceless treasure chest and do nothing to lay hold of it? Dear friend, lay hold of Christ this morning! Abandon any hope of achieving righteousness by your own merit, and cast all your hope on the righteousness of the One who lived, died, and rose again on your behalf!

But others of you, you answer, "Yes. I do know Him. I do go on counting all things as loss for the sake of knowing Him. I do treasure Him more than all that life can offer and all that death can take. I don't do it perfectly. I'm ashamed at how imperfectly I do it given all the truth from His Word that I know. And like Paul I say, "Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect. Oh, but I *press on*." And by the grace of God, yes, He *is* all my hope for righteousness, and yes, He *is* my delight and my reward."

For those of you, my brothers and sisters, who can answer that way, I just entreat you to feast the appetites of your soul on this glorious Savior! Rearrange everything in your life so that you might ever be deepening your personal, intimate knowledge of this Jesus. Read His Word. Pray

to Him. Fellowship with His people. Preach His Gospel to a world that needs to be snatched as brands from the burning. And endure suffering with Him. Bear His reproach. Let all that He is keep you from ever seeking your righteousness *or* your satisfaction anywhere else.