

“I Want To Know Christ”
Philippians 3:10-11

April 1, 2018
Easter

INTRO: We had a cat a few years ago named Midge.

She had three litters of kittens in a row.

So for a while, we were covered up with kittens and during that time we gained a new appreciation for two sayings.

The first saying is: As playful as a kitten.

Kittens play. One of the funniest things is to watch them ambush each other.

One will see another coming—crouch down just like lion—then—

Pounce, growl, kick, run away. Then do it all over again.

Or just throw them a wadded up piece of paper. They bat it around, great fun.

Second saying we grew to appreciate is: Chasing his tail.

Kittens really do chase their own tails.

They’re laying there, tail twitching—get this look in eye—go around and around.

Then they catch it—chew on it for a minute—but that doesn’t hold attention.

Let go, tail starts twitching again—And they’re off, chasing it again—

Around and around they go.

It’s funny to see a kitten do that—but when say a person is “chasing his tail” that’s not funny. It means his life is full of futility.

He’s pursuing something with all might and with great importance, but he’s not getting anywhere.

Or when he gets it, it’s not all it cracked up to be.

So off the person goes on another chase, around in circles.

Earlier in letter Paul describes how before he knew Jesus he was chasing his tail. He wanted the status and security that came from having all the right connections, and the right education, and commitment to a religious and political cause, and the regard of those who were the leaders in that cause.

That was Paul’s pursuit. He chased it complete sincerity and zeal.

And he achieved it. All his personal goals were met.

He used his Jewish pedigree to greatest advantage,

he got the best and most prestigious academic credentials.

He was recognized as a young up and coming leader in his religious/political party.

But there came a point in his life where realized this was all chasing his tail. That’s not the way Paul put it.

He said that he encountered something so great that it made him realize that all these things he had devoted his life to getting were rubbish.

Those were his words: “I consider them rubbish.”

All my tail chasing, all those things that were so important to me. Rubbish. King James Version puts Paul’s words in more earthy Elizabethan English: I do count them but dung.

So what then became the new pursuit of Paul’s life? He says:

“I want to know Christ.” That became his great ambition.

Over and over the Bible says that the most important thing is to know God—not just know about Him, but to know Him personally. Jeremiah 9

This is what the LORD says: “Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me.”

Knowing Lord more important than wisdom, strength or riches—

Which are the three biggest things in life that people chase.

Wisdom. I want to be the smartest.

Strength: I want power, I want to be in control.

Riches: I want wealth, assets, possessions.

But Lord says that none of those are as important as knowing Him.

That’s exactly what Paul came to realize.

This is a great passage for Easter because did you notice how Paul connects knowing Christ with the events of Easter?

I want to know Christ—Christ’s resurrection, suffering, and our resurrection.

Easter Sunday is a perfect day, probably best day to ask yourself—what is my great ambition? What am I chasing?

Do I want to know Jesus Christ above everything else—or is he way down list?

This passage shows three great blessings that come from knowing Christ.

Nothing else you chase can give you these things. Only Jesus can.

Want this to be an encouragement to you who do want to know Christ—to keep on wanting to know him more, growing closer to Him.

For those of you whose great ambition is something else—

hope this shows you what you are missing. Christ alone can satisfy longings.

MP#1 The first great blessing of knowing Christ is power to change.

There was a time when Paul chased political and religious power,

but then he caught a glimpse of a greater power, and that was what he wanted. He wanted the power that comes from knowing Christ.

He calls it the power of Christ's resurrection.

What is the power of Christ's resurrection?

You know the resurrection story. Jesus was put to death on a Roman cross.

His lifeless body was taken down, wrapped in shroud, put in tomb.

But early in the morning, on first day of week, by the power of the Spirit of God he was made alive again. He rose from dead.

The unique and powerful thing about Jesus' resurrection was that his body was not made alive as it had been. He was not just brought back to life as he was.

In the resurrection he was changed. He was transformed.

Jesus was made alive in a way that put him beyond power of death forever.

He was different, he was glorious.

Knowing Christ means the power of his resurrection comes into your life.

The same Spirit who made Jesus alive and transformed him is in you.

That resurrection power gives you the power for real change.

The Holy Spirit takes the dead things in your life, makes new.

You begin to experience moral and spiritual transformation.

There is nothing else you can chase in life that will give you power to truly change.

What about the big three in Jeremiah's list: wisdom, strength and riches.

If you achieve them they can help you make some external changes, some behavioral changes, change your geography or your friends.

But they can bring no spiritual and moral transformation.

Knowing Christ brings real change through his resurrection power.

A few years ago Glenda Murcks told me a story about the resurrection power of

Jesus changing a man. This story caused Glenda a lot of grief, it brings her painful memories, so I asked her permission to tell it. She graciously agreed.

When Glenda's youngest son was in his 20s he was killed in a fight with his own father, who was Glenda's ex-husband at the time.

Father and son got into an argument that turned physical.

The son got knocked down, hit his head, and the injury was fatal.

The authorities decided not to charge or prosecute his father.

But you can imagine the terrible guilt and grief this man felt.

It almost drove him to suicide.

But he began to go to church and pray and ask God's forgiveness.

And then he said he had become a Christian and God had forgiven him. When Glenda first told me this story, we were in the car going to Covenant Group together, and I asked her if she thought her ex-husband's conversion was real. Did she think he really was saved?

Did she think he had really turned to Christ or had he just turned to religion—which people sometimes do to try to deal with their guilt?

She said: I know it was real, because he changed. Then she gave two proofs.

He was stingy and he became generous.

He quit cursing and began to bless God and other people.

There are people who are stingy tightwads but out of guilt or grief they start giving money away in an attempt to atone for their sins or soothe their sorrows.

That's not change.

Money is still the idol they are trusting to get them through life.

But this man really changed. His heart changed. His affections changed.

He came to know Christ, the power of his resurrection, that made him generous.

That's different from just changing your spending habits.

Let not the rich man boast in his riches but boast that he knows me.

And his speech—curses to blessings—that's not superficial.

Jesus said: From the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks!

A true speech change is the result of heart change, that takes resurrection power.

Grief and guilt usually make a person's speech more bitter, more self-recriminating.

Those shocks in life tend to lower inhibitions and the ugly stuff comes out.

But knowing Christ and the power of his resurrection changed this man's tongue.

What are the dead things in your life?

Bitterness? Bitter at a person who robbed you of dreams for happy life?

Lots of things you could pursue to deal with that bitterness external way.

Try to distract self from it by shopping and spending. Living well the best revenge.

Ignore the person, cut him out of emotions.

Those strategies might work. But wouldn't be real change.

Or, could make knowing Christ your goal—resurrection power.

Where there was once bitterness—start to discover forgiveness.

Where there was self-pity—start to discover gratitude.

Where there was discontent—start to discover contentment.

What a perfect time, Easter Sunday, to make this your ambition—to know Christ—and the power of his resurrection.

I'm going to quit relying on all the other strategies I have for dealing

with dead areas of life—bitterness, self-pity, discontent—seek to know Christ.

MP#2 The second great blessing of knowing Christ is comfort in suffering.

If you follow Jesus that must mean life becomes less and less painful.

You suffer less. Right?

Some people teach that.

They teach or imply that becoming a Christian is stepping into a magic circle—if you just have enough faith, won't suffer. But that's not true.

Paul says he wants to know Christ and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings.

Paul starts with the power of Christ's resurrection—then goes back to the cross.

You can't celebrate Easter without remembering what happened on Good Friday. Crucifixion was the culmination of a ministry marked by opposition and betrayal. When you make it your ambition to know Christ, it is not that you will suffer less, but as Paul says: You will know the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings.

What does that mean? The fellowship of sharing in his sufferings?

It means as you suffer Jesus meets you and comforts you as one who also suffered

When we lived in Florida, we knew two elderly couples who were best friends.

They had even retired together on Marco Island.

One of the husbands told me about beginning of their friendship decades before. He was helping backstage at a children's Christmas program at a school.

As he watched the children so full of nerves and excitement he started weeping, because he and his wife had lost a little girl the same age as those children.

Another parent who he didn't know came over and asked: Are you ok?

He said: No, I'm not ok. And told her why he was weeping.

She burst into tears and said: We lost a child too.

That was their introduction. The fellowship of sharing in suffering.

The fellowship of sharing in his suffering has a specific and a general setting.

Jonathan prayed for believers in Pakistan this morning. Persecuted believers in the Islamic world testify to an amazing sense of the fellowship of Christ.

I recently read the autobiography of Bilquis Sheikh, *I Dared Call Him Father*.

Her descriptions of the fellowship of sharing in Christ's sufferings vivid.

And there are milder situations. If you make a decision or say something because of your loyalty to Christ—negative repercussions in family, school—you will know the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings.

That's the specific setting for this. Suffering for Christ in some way.

But there is also a general setting.

You can know the fellowship of sharing in Christ's suffering in all the bad and painful things that happen as a result of life in this fallen world.

Theologians refer to Christ's whole time on earth before the resurrection as his

humiliation. He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, as Isaiah put it. If knowing him is your great ambition, then when you go through bad things, you will enjoy the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings. He will at times impress his intimacy and presence on your soul.

A friend of mine was recently reflecting on his wife's battle with cancer that eventually took her life. He said that was the worst time in his life. And yet he can't help looking back on it with a kind of wistful longing, because never since then has he felt such a sense of Christ's presence.

How easy it is when things are going well in life to be just like the person Jeremiah criticizes—to pursue wisdom, strength, and riches—to chase your tail. And then when the suffering times come, you feel empty and lost. Don't wait for suffering times to come.

Make it your ambition to know Christ now. He's the treasure. How do you know him? You have to first believe in him. Trust him. Accept him into your heart.

And then Jesus has provided ways for people who trust him to know him better. These aren't flashy. They aren't quick. This is slow relationship building. He has given us his Word to read and study. Promises here to claim. Prayer. You have to talk to him to know him and feel close to him.

And then one more: Fellowship with his people. This is crucial. Fellowship of sharing in Christ's suffering comes about through regular, year in and year out, rubbing shoulders with other people in the body of Christ. Because what happens in church life is that you always know someone who is suffering in some way. And when they talk about their suffering and Christ's closeness it teaches you. It makes you jealous in a good way to know Jesus. When you suffer, then it's your turn to be an encouragement. It's Easter Sunday: As we look back at Christ's crucifixion, life of suffering—What a perfect time to make it your great ambition to know Him. and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings.

MP#3 The third great blessing of knowing Christ is hope for the future.

What is the Christians' hope for the future?

Paul says that it is the resurrection from the dead. When believers die our souls go to heaven, bodies are buried. But that is not the end. Not destined to live as spirits forever. God's final plan for us is that we will be raised as Jesus was raised.

How was he raised? It was him. The disciples knew him.

Touch me, he said. I'm not a ghost. I have flesh and bones.

Put your finger here, touch these scars on my hand and on my side.

Which is amazing, that Jesus' Christ's resurrected and glorified body has scars.

The old theologians use the phrase that we will be raised in our self-same bodies.

We will be recognizable. It will be us.

And yet we will at the same time be changed and glorified.

Filled with new powers and new beauties.

I know someone who says she wants to be able to eat dessert in heaven and not gain weight. Maybe that will be one of the traits of glorified body.

But seriously, what is it? What do we have to look forward to?

There's an interesting hint in the phrase Paul uses.

I want to know Christ and so somehow to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

That's the way most Bible versions put it, something like that.

But Paul actually uses a strange word for resurrection. I think only place.

It's the word resurrection with the prefix ex. Prefix ex in Greek means out of.

Instead of the resurrection it's the ex-urrection, the out-surrection.

Then, one more detail, he doesn't just say from the dead but out of the dead.

So he's eager to attain the out-surrection out of the dead.

The point he's making is that one of the glories of the resurrection is that we're going to be taken out of everything dead. Everything tainted by sin.

We're out of it. Everything tainted by the fall. We're out of it.

We'll experience that not only in ourselves, body and spirit—

but we'll experience it even in our environment.

Here's how it's described in Revelation:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

A world washed. The old order gone.

There's another passage in Revelation that describes the New Jerusalem, and a park in the middle of the city.

But as you read about this park, you realize it's the Garden of Eden restored.

So Central Park in the New Jerusalem is the Garden of Eden.

In that park is the tree of life, just like in Eden.

But it's not just one tree, it's grown into a forest, lining both sides of a crystal

clear river—the river of the water of life, flowing through the Garden.

One more detail, leaves always green, trees full of fruit 12 months of the year.

Which means—no winter. No death. Perpetual summer. A kingdom of summer. Do you remember that wonderful morning as a child waking up on the first day of summer? The deadness of desks and homework are gone.

The outurrection out of the dead. Freedom and warmth for weeks, months.

Here's what I'm saying with that—maybe you liked school—but bundle up all the best and most wonderful moments of your life into a great big ball

and you have just a tiny appetizer of what God has planned for those who love.

You will be raised for your inheritance which is the new heavens and new earth.

This world transformed by Christ as the home for his people.

Look at the way Paul describes it in verses 20 and 21 of this chapter.

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,²¹ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

But what does Paul mean when he says: Becoming like him in death—

and so somehow to attain to the resurrection from the dead?

That “somehow” sounds like he is doubtful. Will it happen?

Will I be resurrected?

Can't be doubt—because Paul is so certain everywhere else in his writings—

just like he is at the end of this chapter. So what is he saying here?

What does this “and so somehow to attain to the resurrection from the dead” mean?

Actually an expression of certainty and hope.

Paul is saying that he knows Christ, knows certainty of resurrection—

the only thing he doesn't know is what is going to happen in between.

He has no idea what tomorrow will hold—but so what—he knows last chapter

Ran across a sermon by an old Baptist preacher.

He Imagines Paul elaborating on this point:

“I know I shall rise from the dead and see Jesus. I have no doubts about that, but I've no idea what's going to happen between now and then, and thank God I don't. I don't want to know. Perhaps at my trial before Caesar I will be exonerated and given my freedom so that for many years, until my old age, I shall preach Christ. That may be my route to death and resurrection. Or tomorrow I may be summoned to appear before Caesar and found guilty and put to death. That may be my route to the resurrection. Somehow or other, I shall attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

That kind of hope enables you to face every day with confidence.

What will happen today? What will happen this year?

You have no idea.

All your plans and ambitions could be dashed.

Businesses fail, marriages fail, health fails—
this world is one of change and decay.

That is one reason why Paul could look at all he chased in first part of life—
and say it's rubbish—I consider it dung—

because how can our plans and ambitions stand against uncertainties of life?

But Christ never changes. Promises never change.

Hope of the resurrection is that one day we will be like Christ.

Somehow we're going to get there. We can leave that in his wise hands.

So on this Easter Sunday—ponder not just Christ's death and resurrection—
but what that means for the future.

And what a perfect day to make it your ambition to know Him—
and no longer put your hopes in things that change and fail.