

To Be in the Lord Is the Only Safe Place

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[0 : 01] And now we come to our Bible reading, and today we're reading from Philippians chapter 3, reading from verse 1 right through to chapter 4, verse 1. Edward Lobb has been going through Philippians with us over the summer, and after a brief break, we're digging back into this letter from the Apostle Paul, this lovely, warm and encouraging letter.

So, Philippians chapter 3, starting at verse 1 together. Amen. Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.

To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. Look out for the dogs. Look out for the evildoers. Look out for those who mutilate the flesh.

For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.

Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more. Circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the law, a Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

[1 : 29] But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of knowing Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord.

For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible, I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I've already obtained this or I'm already perfect, but I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own.

But one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

[3 : 04] Brothers, join in imitating me and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.

Their end is destruction, their God is their belly, and they glory in their shame. With mindset on earthly things.

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

Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

Amen. This is the word of the Lord, and may he bless it to us. Well, good morning, friends.

[4 : 25] Very good to see you all, and welcome also to those who are watching on the screen elsewhere, Queen's Park, Kelvin Grove, and perhaps elsewhere. Well, let's turn up our passage, Philippians chapter 3.

And I want to start this morning by pointing out the key idea which is expressed in chapter 3, verse 1, and in chapter 4, verse 1.

And it's the phrase, in the Lord. Just look with me at chapter 3, verse 1. Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. And then look at chapter 4, verse 1.

Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. So we have rejoice in the Lord, chapter 3, verse 1, and stand firm in the Lord, 4-1. And the whole passage between these two verses is going to teach us what it means to be in the Lord and to stand firm in the Lord. And I'm giving this sermon the title, to be in the Lord is the only safe place.

[5 : 37] Looking at the second half of chapter 3, verse 1. To write the same things to you is no trouble for me and is safe for you. So the place of safety is to be in the Lord, to rejoice in him and to stand firm in him.

Now, this phrase, the Lord, here, in Paul's thinking, means the Lord Jesus. When Paul writes about the Lord, he always means the Lord Jesus. He's not talking here about God the Father. And if you look on to the beginning of verse 9 in chapter 3, you'll see that Paul's great desire is to be found in him, that is, in Christ, found there ultimately by God the Father.

So, friends, to be in the Lord is the safe place. It is the only safe place. To be in Jesus Christ means to belong to him, to be part of him, to be saved, rescued, and forgiven.

Being in him brings with it the assurance of eternal life, eternal peace, and eternal joy. Surely, it would only be a great fool who would not want to be in the Lord Jesus Christ forever.

Now, why does Paul bring in this section of teaching at this point in his letter? Well, it's three weeks since we were in Philippians together, so let me just take a moment to remind you of what Paul has been saying to the Philippians so far.

[7 : 03] He loves this church. It's a small church, probably, not very strong, but it's doing its best to fly the flag for Jesus in the pagan city of Philippi in northeastern Greece.

But Paul has become aware of tensions within the fellowship, and indeed a threat to the unity of the fellowship. Now, he mentions Epaphroditus in chapter 2, verse 25, and Epaphroditus, a senior member of the church at Philippi, has made the long journey from Philippi to Rome to visit Paul in prison there, and Epaphroditus has not been able to give to Paul a really good report on the church. He's had to reveal to Paul that there are tensions. So look at chapter 2, verse 14, 2, 14. Do all things without grumbling or disputing.

Now, surely he writes like that because Epaphroditus has reported that there are people in the church who are grumbling. And look on to chapter 4, verse 2, where Paul has to appeal to two women, Euodia and Syntyche, to set their differences aside and agree with each other.

And the next verse, chapter 4, verse 3, makes it clear that these are senior members of the church. They're real workers for the gospel. But they've fallen out with each other. And Paul is having to name them publicly and to say to them, Come on, sisters, enough of this.

[8 : 27] Stop it. So the central appeal of this letter is an appeal to the Philippians to become really united in a way that they are not.

Paul puts it most forcefully at chapter 1, verse 27. 1, 27. Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel so that, whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you're standing firm in one spirit with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel and not frightened in anything by your opponents.

And look on to chapter 2, verse 2. It's much the same theme. Complete my joy. Fill up my cup of happiness by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from rivalry, rivalry with each other in the church, or conceit. So clearly, some people in the church were jostling for position. They were throwing their weight around.

And Paul is having to say to them, stop trying to be the biggest dog in the kennel. Learn to look up to each other in humility, not down at each other with pride and self-importance.

[9 : 41] And in chapter 2, verses 5 to 8, Paul brings in the supreme example of the humility of Jesus. And he says, this is the way to think. This is the mind or mentality that you need to develop in your relationships with each other in the church.

If you will learn to be humble and united, you will then not be frightened by your opponents, as he puts it in chapter 1, verse 28. So Paul's big aim in writing this letter is to develop the Philippians' unity and unanimity so that they can, in the words of chapter 2, verse 16, hold out or hold forth the word of life, the gospel, to their contemporaries in this pagan Gentile city.

Disunity sucks the guts out of any church and makes it ineffective. And the implications of all this for a 21st century church are obvious. God requires our unity, and our unity will only grow out of real humility in our relationships with each other in the church.

Now, chapter 1, verse 28, mentions the opposition, your opponents, as Paul calls them. And it's in chapter 3 that he opens up the nature of this opposition.

So look at chapter 3, verse 2, and you'll see the language is very forceful. 3, 2. Look out for the dogs, the evildoers, those who mutilate the flesh.

[11 : 11] This is not diplomatic language. Paul is never prepared to wrap things up when the future of the gospel is at stake. He loves his Philippian Christian friends, and that's why he's so determined that they should not be taken in.

The danger is that they'll be deceived by these opponents. The danger is that they won't recognize the opponents as opponents. Remember, Jesus spoke forcibly about just this danger.

He said in Matthew chapter 7, Beware of false prophets, false teachers. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

In other words, they look so nice. They look so plausible and friendly. They say, Bah! Nice sheep. Welcome sheep. Let me pat you. Welcome to our cozy little flock. Come in and join us for dinner.

A wolf in wolf's clothing would be instantly recognizable, and you'd have nothing to do with it. But he comes to you looking so nice and friendly. Now, it must have been the same at Philippi.

[12 : 16] If these dogs, so-called dogs, looked like pit bull terriers, pit bull terriers, the Philippians would instantly show them the door. But they don't look like pit bull terriers.

So what is it about their teaching that Paul is warning the Philippians against? Well, it's summed up in the phrase at the end of verse 2. They mutilate the flesh.

And that is Paul's way of describing circumcision and the insistence of these people that Gentile men who want to become Christians should be circumcised. In other words, these people were saying to Gentiles, if you want to become a Christian, you've got to become a Jew first.

The only way into the kingdom, Christ's kingdom, is by submitting to the rites and rituals of the Jewish faith. Now, all that seems so bizarre to us today.

Nobody comes to a church like this or to any church today saying you've got to become a Jew in order to become a Christian. And the reason why this doesn't happen today is that by the grace of God, Paul settled the argument.

[13 : 24] He won the argument 20 centuries ago. It's abundantly clear to us today that we don't have to start eating kosher foods or celebrating the various Jewish feasts or circumcising our boys and men so as to be Christians.

But this was not clear in the first century. It's clear to us, but it was not clear then. Now, this was not just a problem at Philippi.

It was a problem that kept on raising its head all across the Mediterranean world as new churches were quickly springing up in Gentile cities all the way from Antioch in Syria across to Rome.

And don't forget that the first Christians were all Jews. They were all steeped in the law of Moses. So when Jesus came as the fulfillment of Judaism, not the abolition of Judaism, but its fulfillment, many people assumed that every aspect of the law of Moses must continue to be observed by Christians.

Circumcision, the food laws about clean and unclean foods, celebrating the festivals, tabernacles and Passover and Yom Kippur. They assumed that all this would carry on as an essential part of belonging to Christ.

[14 : 40] And it required a leader of exceptional ability to sort out the tangle. And the Lord commissioned Paul, a man of great intellectual ability and a man who knew his Old Testament backwards.

The Lord commissioned Paul not only to bring the gospel to the Gentile world, but also to teach the young churches how Christ, in fulfilling the law and the prophets, set his people free from such things as the food laws and the necessity of circumcision.

But this was a constant battle for Paul, right from his conversion in about 34 AD to his death in about 64 AD. And almost certainly, the battle was not fully won when he reached the end of his life. But by the grace of God, the back of the problem had been broken. And in the succeeding years, the churches came to accept his teaching as authoritative and his letters quickly became recognized as scripture, as the very word of God.

Well now let's turn to our passage, the details of it, where Paul first exposes what was wrong with this teaching and then second, opens up to us the heart of the real Christian faith.

[15 : 54] Now this third chapter is very meaty. I only want to take verses 2 to 11 this morning and then we'll turn, God willing, to the second half of the chapter next week. So we'll look at verses 2 to 11 in two sections.

First, we see the stifling effect of personal and religious pride. And second, the glorious comfort of knowing Christ truly.

First then, verses 2 to 6, the stifling effect of personal and religious pride. Now as we've seen, Paul delivers this sharp opening criticism of the Philippians opponents in verse 2, calling them dogs, evildoers, and flesh mutilators.

And we know he's talking about circumcision there because he immediately says in verse 3, for we, the true Christians, are the real circumcision. Now the big idea behind circumcision was that it was a badge or a distinctive mark showing that a man truly belonged to the God of Israel.

And it was a mark made, as you know, not in a man's ear or finger or foot, but in what we might call the organ of generation or begetting. Because membership of the covenant people of Israel was passed on to the next generation from father to child through the process of conception and childbirth.

[17 : 18] It was a physical mark made in the flesh of the father who was in effect transmitting the blessings of covenant membership to his offspring. But in verse 3 here, Paul is saying that that physical fleshly mark is no longer needed.

We, verse 3, are the real circumcision, those who really belong to the Lord, we who belong to Christ, whether we are Jews or Gentiles, we are now the true members of the Israel of God. Paul is saying it's not a mark in the flesh that secures our membership of God's people. We are the real circumcision, verse 3, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.

You see how flesh and spirit are contrasted there. It's a spiritual matter. It has nothing to do with a mark made in the body. And it's that phrase at the end of verse 3 we put no confidence in the flesh that triggers Paul into what he says in verses 4, 5, and 6.

And in those three verses, 4 to 6, Paul is putting into words what a proud Jew would say about his Jewish credentials, the credentials in which he placed his confidence.

[18 : 34] He says in verse 3, we are the real circumcision, the true people of God who put no confidence in the flesh. And then Paul describes the sea change that has come over him since he became a Christian.

He says in verse 4, if confidence in the flesh were the way to belong to God, I would be at the top of the class. And when he refers to flesh here, he's not just talking about circumcision.

He means his whole human identity. That's what he had trusted for so many years as his guarantee of being accepted by God. So let's look at these autobiographical details because they're really very interesting.

Verse 4, if anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, in his human identity, I have more. Nobody can outdo me. I'm top of the class.

And Paul then moves from his birth and childhood in the city of Tarsus to what he later became as a young adult in Jerusalem. So he's talking both about the things that his parents gave him, his origin there, and also the things that he later achieved by the force of his own character.

[19 : 49] So you can almost hear the pride in his voice. Verse 5, I was circumcised on the eighth day after my birth, the very day prescribed in the Old Testament law. I'm of the people of Israel, no mixed blood in my veins, I can assure you.

I was born into the tribe of Benjamin, the tribe that produced Saul, the first king of Israel. Of course, Paul's actual Jewish name was Saul, and he was probably named after King Saul.

And therefore, verse 5, I'm a Hebrew of Hebrews. If you want to look at the quintessence of Judaism, look no further than yours truly. But then Paul moves on to what he became as a young adult.

At some period during his teenage years, he left Tarsus and went to live in Jerusalem to study. A little bit like somebody leaving a quiet Scottish country town to go to Edinburgh to study.

And we know from his speech in Acts 22 that he studied under a man called Gamaliel, who was the leading rabbi of Phariseism. So Paul, as a very young man, went to the top professor in Jerusalem so as to make a comprehensive study of the life and thought of the Pharisees, who were regarded as the leading experts in Old Testament interpretation and study.

[21 : 11] Jesus described them in John chapter 5 as searching the scriptures. They knew the scriptures backwards. So Paul says in verse 5, as to the law, the law of Moses, the law of God, I became a Pharisee.

But that's not all. As to zeal, I was a persecutor of the church and I was proud of it. I became a kind of religious terrorist.

He puts it in Acts 22. I persecuted Christians to the death, binding and delivering them to prison, both men and women. I journeyed towards Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds, shackled to Jerusalem to be punished.

Can you imagine what sort of a man he was? He was fierce, he was ferocious, he was violent, horrible. His years of zealous study had convinced him that Jesus was some kind of imposter and the young church was an organization that threatened true Judaism and had to be squashed, if necessary, by terror and violence.

He hated Jesus and he hated Christians. So what kind of a view did he develop of himself following all this activity? Well, he tells us in verse 6, as to righteousness, under the law, I was blameless.

[22 : 34] I kept the Ten Commandments. Nobody could point a finger at me and say that I'd stepped out of line. By means of unstinting labor and tireless activity, I thought of myself as, and here's the key word in verse 6, righteous.

According to God's law, blameless, and therefore in God's sight, by reason of my wonderful efforts, righteous. Now, we'll come on to verse 9 in just a few minutes, but let's peep ahead to it just for a moment, verse 9.

Paul is going to say there that after he had become a Christian, he did not have a righteousness of his own that comes from obeying God's law, but a different righteousness altogether, a righteousness that comes through faith in Christ, a righteous status that comes from God and depends on faith, not on his own works and merits.

But I'm jumping the gun there. We'll come back to that in a moment. Let's go back to Paul's self-portrait in verses 4 to 6. Verses 4 to 6 show us how Paul regarded himself before he met Jesus on the Damascus road.

This is, if you like, Paul's pre-Christian CV. And he must have frequently run over that list of qualifications in his own mind. It is self-congratulatory from top to bottom.

[23 : 59] The essence of it is pride. Pride in what he was by birth and pride in what he became by effort. But when we read on to verses 7 and 8, we can see what Paul thinks of that list of Jewish qualifications now that he's become a Christian.

He uses here the language of a bookkeeper or an accountant. He speaks of loss and gain. Verse 7, but whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

He had regarded that list of achievements as great gain, great advantage, something to rejoice in, but not now. As he looks back, he now regards it as total loss.

He develops his thinking further in verse 8, indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord.

For his sake, I've suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him. So he's saying here, I don't now simply regard my Jewish track record as loss.

[25 : 10] I regard everything in my past life as loss, and I don't regret shedding all that stuff. On the contrary, I regard it as rubbish, something to be taken to the dustbin and donated to the city council.

In fact, the word translated rubbish should probably be translated dung, or even some colorful synonym for that word that you might think of. It's very strong language, it's biting language. Everything that I was so proud of, the advantages of my birth and the achievements of my labors, I cast it into the dustbin of my life, I flushed the chain on it, goodbye to all that, it's not worth a brass farthing.

What a way to look at your past life. But Paul is teaching us to look at our past lives in the same kind of way.

Now just think of it, each of us can look back on our past lives, and even if there have been painful episodes, even dishonorable ones, we can find all sorts of bits and pieces with which to feel pleased with ourselves.

[26 : 19] Like Paul, there's the stuff that we were born with, and like Paul, there's stuff that we have achieved. And this is true of everybody, not just people who have had a high public profile, like

professors and captains of industry, and significant politicians, and so forth, but everybody, high and low, rich and poor, people of all ethnic backgrounds, just think of the things that we were born with, or perhaps born into.

For example, maybe you came from a really gritty working class family, and you were proud of your grandfather, this tough working man who spent his whole life in the shipyards on the Clyde and survived, and your grandmother, poor but thrifty, bringing up seven children in a tiny house, and yet still being able to send them to school in clean clothes.

Maybe your grandfather was a chief in an African village, deeply respected by everybody in that village. Maybe your ancestor was the clan chief of the Mac this or the Mac that in Inverness Shire, and your parents have often reminded you of the noble blood in your veins.

Or turning from what you were born with, think of your achievements in sport or the arts, business, in teaching, medicine, academic life. You might even think of religious merits, religious gold stars to pin on your shirt.

Ha, my great-grandfather, he was minister of St. Kentigern's church in Muchweezing for 47 and a half years, and he died in the pulpit. Oh, he was a man. Don't make him like that these days.

[28 : 00] And so we can go on. Pride in this, pride in that, pride in the things that boost our sense of security in the life of this world, this world.

When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died, my richest gain I count but loss and poor contempt on all my pride.

Paul says in verse 7, whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. I poured contempt on all those gains that I thought I had made.

The problem with Paul's self-identity list here in verses 4 to 6 is that it's all about him. He's consumed with interest in himself, pride in himself.

He is the center of his world. In his own pre-Christian view, he has somehow made it into God's favor by his achievements. Look at that telling phrase he uses in the middle of verse 9.

[29 : 03] having a righteousness of my own. That's what he no longer has, but that's what he thought he had. A righteousness of my own that comes from the law. That was his aim as a Pharisee.

A righteousness that comes from what he thought was spotless obedience to God's law. Legalism, legalism, ticking every box that he could see in the law of Moses.

That's what he thought he must do for God to account him as a righteous man and thus worthy of eternal life. It was up to him. That's what he thought. In that Pharisaic way of thinking, essentially you have to be your own savior.

You have to work your way into God's favor. Thank God that we are released from such a burden, as we'll see in just a moment. Paul's conversion from battling proud Pharisee into a deeply humbled Christian, that was such a relief to him.

Look at verse 8. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the supreme worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. For his sake, I've suffered the loss of all things, and I count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ.

[30 : 19] He was filled with joy to have been able to discard forever all that burdensome, religious, effort-centered nonsense. To be a Christian is to be set free from religion.

Paul lost everything, including, of course, his reputation, because he became hated by the Jews who had once honored him for his zeal. To be a Christian is to be set free from religion.

The core idea in religion is that you have a set of rules, and if you can work hard and comply with them, you'll hope that you've been able to work your passage to heaven by your efforts.

So, for example, pray a certain number of times per day in a certain physical posture. Fast according to certain rules. Go on pilgrimage. Give prescribed sums of money to this or that cause.

If you really want to score extra merit points, become a holy man. Abstain from marriage, and so on and so forth. So, for Paul, it was an unspeakable relief to him to have been set free from all that.

[31 : 28] He had counted all that as gain, as advantage. Now he regards it all as loss, rubbish. He has shaken off the stifling effect of personal and religious pride.

So, what has he found instead? Well, this brings us to our second section. He has found instead the glorious comfort of knowing Jesus Christ truly.

Christianity is not a religion. It's a relationship. It's about knowing Christ. Look at verse 8. I count everything, all that religious stuff, as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus,

my Lord.

Notice the word my, my Lord. He is mine, and I am his. Always deeply personal. And notice again the accountant's language of loss and gain.

Verse 8. For his sake I've suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him. So, on the loss side of the account is everything that Paul had once valued.

[32 : 40] On the asset side is Christ. To know him, says Paul, that is the surpassingly valuable thing. This is so radical and it's so wonderful.

Paul had lost everything for the sake of Christ. Think of him here in prison. He had no money, no property, no reputation except a bad one as a disturber of the peace of the Roman Empire. He'd lost his freedom. Here he was shackled in Rome awaiting trial in the emperor's court and knowing that he might be executed. And he is as happy as a schoolboy at the beginning of the summer holidays.

He's free. He's in chains physically, but he's free from the religious demands that used to shackle him. And his joy is in knowing Jesus.

Jesus, whom Paul describes in Galatians as the son of God who loved me. That's the heart of it. Loved me.

[33 : 41] And gave himself for me. Now, friends, just think of yourself. Sorry about that. I find it so moving to think of Jesus' love for me and for you.

But just think of yourself reaching a point in life where you, like Paul, have nothing, nothing in this world left, nothing you can cling to or enjoy.

What I mean is when you're dying, think of that. Money means nothing. You can no longer use it. Food and drink, no longer a pleasure.

You haven't even the energy to watch television or listen to music or read a book. You hardly have the strength to lift your head from the pillow. But if you're a Christian, you have Jesus and therefore you have everything.

In Paul's words in verse 8, you have the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, your Lord. And the arrival of death will bring you full-bloodedly into his eternal kingdom where you will see him face to face and be with him.

[34 : 44] To die is gain, as Paul says in chapter 1, verse 21. But in verses 9, 10, and 11 here, Paul opens up the wonder of knowing Christ and gaining Christ.

And these three verses take us to the heart of what it means in our real experience to be a Christian. So just briefly, let's notice three things about the real Christian life in verses 9 to 11. Righteousness, resurrection, and suffering. First then, righteousness, verse 9. Not having a righteousness of my own, a righteousness that I've worked and toiled to gain, a righteousness that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

Now, we need to be clear on what Paul means here by righteousness. He means righteousness in the sight of God, as measured by God or accounted by God.

He's talking about the way that God looks with favor at a Christian man or a Christian woman. He looks at that man or woman and he says, righteous, acceptable to me.

[35 : 58] This man, this woman, is accounted by me as righteous and therefore can be sure of enjoying eternal life. The unrighteous will be banished forever from me.

The righteous will be with me forever. But this is not a status of righteousness that Paul or you or I could ever gain by hard labor at conforming to God's law.

Look again at verse 9. Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from obeying God's law. Such a righteousness is impossible. None of us can attain that.

We're sinful. We can never measure up to God's standards even if we tried for a thousand years.

So how does this status of being accounted righteous in the sight of God, how does it come to us? Well, verse 9 again. It comes through faith in Christ. It's a righteousness from God. From God. And it depends on faith in Christ.

[36 : 58] So the origin of this righteous status is not my moral efforts. It's God. It is from him. And I receive it by faith, by trusting Christ, trusting that he has borne the penalty for my unrighteousness on the cross.

He has wiped out my slate clean. He has carried the can for me in every way. He was wounded for our transgressions, as the prophet Isaiah puts it, which means his wounds have fully dealt with our transgressions.

And that is why the Christian is able to jump for joy and turn a few cartwheels. We're free from the burden of our sin, free from our unrighteousness. So we may lose everything in this life as Paul did. In fact, friends, we will lose everything in this life at the end when we can't even raise a cup of tea to our lips. But if we have Christ, we have everything.

What we leave behind is rubbish. What lies before us is pure gain, pure joy. Now, the other two things, resurrection and suffering, they're all tied up together.

[38 : 10] Here's verse 10. That I may know him, Jesus, and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.

Now, the order of things seems a little odd there. We might expect sufferings to come before resurrection. That, after all, was the experience of Jesus.

And Paul charts that for us in chapter 2, verses 8 and 9. Death first, death on a cross, and then exaltation. But Paul puts it the other way around here in chapter 3, verse 10.

And the reason is this. Well, let me put it as a question. What is going to give you and me the strength to endure suffering for the sake of Christ? When your Christian faith and your Christian lifestyle make you deeply unpopular in the world that you live in and work in, how are you going to survive with your faith and your lifestyle intact?

When people begin to hate you, perhaps to sack you from your job because of your beliefs, maybe take you to court because you refuse to get in line with the world's perversities.

[39 : 20] What is going to sustain you then? The answer is the power of Christ's resurrection, which is already at work in you. As a Christian, you have come to believe with conviction that just as Jesus was raised from the grave, so you also will be raised.

And already, even now, a significant part of your thinking is in heaven with him. So your physical body is aging and decaying, but your mind is stretching forward with glad anticipation to your life in heaven.

And it's that conviction about the resurrection that sustains you now in your times of trial and pain. Paul knows the power of Christ's resurrection now in his Roman prison.

And it's that power that sustains him, enabling him to suffer even to the point of death as Jesus had done before him. And then look at the final verse, 11.

That by any means possible, I may attain the resurrection from the dead. That's where the whole force of his life and longing is now invested, in the resurrection.

[40 : 31] When he says by any means possible, we're bound to ask, is Paul saying that he's a bit uncertain about his resurrection? The answer is no, not at all.

What is uncertain is not the goal, but the way to it. The resurrection is certain. It's the intervening events which are uncertain.

Was Paul going to be executed in a very few days' time? Or might he be released to live on for many years? And it's the same for us. Any Christian might step into the resurrection tomorrow. Or it might not be for many years into the future. So let's learn from Paul the glorious comfort of knowing Christ truly. Righteousness.

We're set free from religion. Set free from the awful burden of thinking we must work our moral socks off so as to deserve God's acceptance. No.

[41 : 29] Righteousness is his gift to us. We receive the gift of righteous standing by faith. We trust Christ. Resurrection and suffering.

There will be suffering for any Christian who is unashamed of the teaching of the Bible. It's part of the package. It's the Christian life in this world. It's part of our sharing in the pattern of Jesus' life and experience.

But it's the power of the resurrection that will sustain us in our trials right the way through this life. But then in the world to come resurrection.

Let's bow our heads and we'll pray together. Our dear Lord Jesus. In this world you were despised and rejected.

Indeed you are still despised by so many and rejected by so many. But not by us who put our trust in you and in all that you have done for us.

[42 : 37] And we're so thankful for the way that you came to earth to intervene in our hopeless situation. Give us we pray the power of your resurrection to sustain us now through our times of trial.

Help us for the sake of your honor to bear the sufferings that come to your people. And at the end bring us with great joy into your everlasting kingdom.

And we ask it for your name's sake. Amen. Amen. Amen.