

**Sunday, March 17, 2019 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Lent**  
**“The Surpassing Worth of Knowing Jesus”**

Philippians 3:17-4:1

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Lowry Loop Structure

Adapted from CPR

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Let's begin today with a little true or false pop quiz. True or false: Jesus Christ went to the cross to destroy death and to give you the gift of eternal life. “True,” you say. True or false: Because of what Jesus did for you on the cross, your sins are forgiven, you are covered in the righteousness of Christ, you are declared holy and just before the throne of God. “True,” you say. True or false: On the day of resurrection you will experience never-ending joy and peace as you stand face-to-face with your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. “True,” you say.

So then why does criticism bother you so much? Why do you sometimes worry about the future? Why are you sometimes so unhappy with how your life has turned out? Why—if you know all that—are you so often dissatisfied and discontent? You see, you just scored 100 percent on the pop quiz—you made an A. Yet you seem to be failing when it comes to actually living out your Christian life.

Our text for today is from the Book of Philippians. One of the major themes of that book is the power of the Gospel to make a substantial difference in your life, to give you joy and peace, no matter what. Paul writes: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice” (4:4).

Now, some of you might be thinking, “Come on, Pastor. Rejoice in the Lord always? You don't actually expect us to take that literally, do you? You don't actually expect us to believe it's possible for us to rejoice during the tough times, to rejoice during the hard times, do you?”

Well, let me answer that question with a question. What was going on in Paul's life when he wrote this letter to the Church at Philippi? What might have caused him to write such a remarkable thing? Was he on some sort of dream vacation? Had he just won the lottery? No. As he says in the very first chapter of Philippians, Paul wrote this letter while he was imprisoned in Rome (v 13).

Paul understood too well how painful life could be. Get this: “Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.” (2 Cor 11:23–27)

Yeah, Paul, knew how painful life could be. And yet despite all of this, as he sat there in prison about to be put on trial for his life, he was somehow able to write these astonishing words: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.”

Folks, I don’t know about you, but it really doesn’t take all that much for me not to rejoice in the Lord. For example: I do not rejoice in the Lord when I pay \$50 for a fill-up of gasoline. I do not rejoice in the Lord when the waiter brings everyone else’s order and forgets mine. I do not rejoice in the Lord when I take my clothes out of the wash and realize I left a packet of tissues in one of my pockets. I do not rejoice in the Lord when I wake up in a panic because I realize I’ve set the alarm for 7 p.m. instead of 7 a.m. These are times when I do not rejoice in the Lord! But Paul (unlike me) was able to rejoice in the Lord always. Paul was able to rejoice in the Lord despite being repeatedly beaten and tortured and tried. Why? Our text for today from Philippians 3 gives us a clue.

In just a moment I’m going to read vv 8–11 of our text, and as I do I want you to picture in your mind’s eye Paul sitting in his prison cell writing these words: “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.”

Do you see what gave Paul strength, what gave Paul hope, even in the most hopeless of situations? He considered everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus his Lord. He considered everything rubbish (in the Greek, literally filth) in order that he might gain Christ and be found in him.

In other words, Paul was given strength, courage, hope, and joy, all because he knew Christ Jesus his Lord and he knew that he would one day see him again face-to-face. As he says here, the unshakable goal of his life was to attain, by the grace of God, the resurrection from the dead. Why? Because Paul knew in the day of resurrection he would finally be with his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ forever.

So, how was Paul able to rejoice in the Lord always? How was he able to write these amazing words while sitting in prison? Here is the central teaching I want you to take home with you today: knowing that he would one day be with Jesus in the future—knowing for certain what his future would be—changed him in the present. This is what he means by those well-known words found in vv 13–14: “But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

You see, Paul knew that the prize was certain. Paul knew that the prize would one day be his. That is what gave him the confidence to keep straining forward—that is what gave him the confidence to keep pressing on—no matter what. You see, **What We Know Our Future to Be Can Actually Change Our Present.**

Let me give you an illustration: There were two men who were both going to be working the same job. It was a terrible, awful job that nobody wanted to do. Eighty hours a week. Backbreaking,

disgusting, menial work, and they wouldn't get paid until the end of the year. One of the men knew that at the end of the year he was going to be paid \$15,000; the other knew he was going to be paid \$15 million. Now, how do you think knowing that might affect the way they viewed their work? The one who knew he was going to be paid only \$15,000 would be bitter and angry and would probably end up quitting before the year was over. The one who knew he was going to be paid \$15 million, for all the aches and pains, fatigue and misery would be happy and joyful and would come to work every day whistling a happy tune! You see, what you know your future to be actually changes you in the present.

My friends, Jesus Christ went to the cross to destroy death and to give you the gift of eternal life. Because of what Jesus did for you on the cross, your sins are forgiven, you are covered in the righteousness of Christ, you are declared holy and just before the throne of God. Because Jesus Christ rose from the dead, you can be certain that you, too, will rise. And on that day of resurrection, you will experience never-ending joy and peace as you stand face-to-face with your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. That is what your future will be! That is the prize you've already won!

What does this mean for your life? How will knowing this change your life today? I leave you with the words of Paul found in Phil 4:4–7: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."