



Living for God

Philippians 3: Knowing Him

This is the first of a two part series on living for God. The proposal is to think about what are the priorities in Christian living. Last Sunday we looked at knowing God personally in relationship through Jesus Christ. We began by asking ourselves the question: What's the difference between knowing about someone and knowing someone personally? When it comes to knowing God, many people claim to know Him, but they simply only know things about God or know him from a distance. Truly knowing God is about being in a relationship with him in Christ.

The Christian life is often described as a marathon. The start is a joy and we're full of energy. During the race we 'hit the wall' as it gets difficult but then there is always a finishing line we cross. Think about this analogy of a marathon as you look through Philippians 3.

Knowing Him personally by faith

In Chapter 3 of Philippians Paul was addressing an issue of false teaching in Philippi. Certain people in the church were teaching that all people must be circumcised to be fully Christian. Paul describes them as being people who put their confidence in the flesh. Paul tells them that if anyone has reason to be confident in the flesh it is him. But he says in verse 7 that all this fleshly confidence is rubbish compared with knowing Christ. Paul's main point here is that we receive righteousness from God by faith and not by works because Christ has won for us a righteousness that far surpasses anything else and in actual fact our own righteousness is rubbish and worth nothing in God's eyes.

Knowing Him better through suffering

It is God's desire that we should become more like Jesus, and it should be our desire too. Paul says in verse 10, "I want to know Christ." Paul wanted to experience Christ's power, Christ's suffering and ultimately to attain to the resurrection from the dead. He uses the metaphor of a race to describe the Christian journey. Paul taught us that we must forget what is behind; meaning, not to let what is in the past, whether good or bad, keep us from moving forward with God. He also urges us to strain forward through the difficulties that come our way as Christians; whether fighting temptation or facing opposition we must trust God and keep our eyes on him.

Knowing Him fully at the resurrection

Finally Paul lifts our eyes to Heaven to where our citizenship lies. He calls us to press on to the goal that is the upward call of Christ Jesus. Paul ends the chapter with the encouragement that our saviour, Jesus Christ, will return to earth and on that day he will transform our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body; this being just one aspect of the new heavens and the new earth that will be created. Paul encourages to eagerly await him, but not in laziness but pressing on, aiming for that which Christ has already won for us.

Questions

Knowing him personally by faith

1. Remind yourselves of the false teaching that was happening in Philippi and discuss how much of a problem this was generally in the early church. (refer to other texts if you wish)
2. What is the irony of Paul's description of the Judaizers in v2? (Are these not the words with which a Jew would label a Gentile?)
3. Read v5-6 What was the importance of each of these things for a Jew? What ways do you make lists of your own achievements which encourage 'confidence in the flesh'? What kind of relationship with God does that produce?
4. What is the difference between gaining a righteousness from God by faith compared to a righteousness that is from the law?
5. Meditate a moment on Paul quote, "I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" How well does this describe your understanding of grace?

Knowing him better through suffering

1. What does Paul mean when he says, "I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me." (V12)
2. Can you think of circumstances in which past success or failure has or is hindering your relationship with God? What promises does scripture give to encourage us in this? (Romans 5:20-21; 1 John 1:9; Ephesians 2:8-10)
3. Why does Paul use the word 'straining' in verse 13, how does it describe the Christian life? Give examples in your personal life.
4. Take a closer look at verses 18-19 and discuss the meaning of each phrase Paul uses to describe those who have turned away from God? What are the dangers of us taking our eyes off the cross? How do different kinds of suffering affect your life? What challenges do you currently face?
5. Share some examples of how God has grown you in Christ-likeness through suffering?

Knowing him fully at the resurrection

1. What does it mean to have your citizenship in heaven? How does that change your view of this world? In what ways should it influence how we live?
2. What do verses 20-21 tell us about what will happen when Jesus returns? Discuss what you know about the resurrected body? (Refer to these additional verses: 1 Corinthians 15:50-57; 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:5; 1 John 3:1-3; Revelation 21:1-4)
3. How can the future gospel hope of heaven motivate us, especially when going through difficult times?