



Rejoice and Look Out

Series: Philippians – To Live Is Christ

Philippians 3:1-3

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Beloved, I don't know if you have ever taken the time to actually look at some of the product warning labels that are on the things that you buy. It's actually kind of humorous and at the same time a little disturbing that there are people in this world who actually need to be told such things. For instance:

Bowl Fresh (for toilets): "Safe to use around pets and children, although it is not recommended that either be permitted to drink from toilet."

Dremel Electric Rotary Tool: "This product not intended for use as a dental drill or in medical applications."

On a hair dryer: "Do not use in shower."

On a kids' superman costume: "Wearing of this garment does not enable you to fly."

Windex: "Do not spray in eyes."

Why am I telling you all of this? Well, here's why. Most of us, if we are normal, really don't need these warnings and so we don't take them seriously at all. We ignore them because they are foolish. Who is actually going to spray Windex in their eyes? In this overprotective, nanny state and sue-happy culture in which, we are exposed to a great number of worthless

warnings every day. And so it is easy to become desensitized to any warnings – even those in Scripture. But to ignore the warnings that Paul gives to us in this text really is life and soul threatening.

This text that we are looking at this morning takes sort of an abrupt turn from last week's text. There, we read about Timothy and Epaphroditus, whom Paul put forward as examples to follow, men to emulate, followers of Christ to imitate in our own walk. But this morning, he is going to give us an important warning surrounded on either side by an exhortation and a reminder – a command for Christians to follow and then a definition of who a follower of Christ is and what he does. This is a pretty intense 3 verses. So let's look at it and let's begin with Paul's command to rejoice in Christ, it's not an option.

Rejoice in Christ, It's Not an Option (1) Paul starts this 3rd chapter by saying: ***“Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.” (Philippians 3:1, ESV)*** Now I want you to understand what Paul is doing. He's reaching back to what he has been teaching before in this text, before he spoke of his travel plans and his commendation of Timothy and Epaphroditus. He reconnecting to that great passage in chapter 2 starting in verse 5: ***“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:5–11, ESV)***

The point Paul is making is this: Jesus has been glorified and exalted as God, Savior, Example and Lord, as we saw in chapter 2. So then, rejoice in Him – delight in Him, find your satisfaction and happiness in Him. This is a very strong word, a strong command. And the point that Paul is making is that all joy, all true and lasting joy, has its source and ultimate object in Him. Is that an overreach, an exaggeration? No, it isn't. We are to find in Him our source of all true joy.

In what do we rejoice? First, that we have a Savior. Look, it is beyond dispute that mankind is messed up. We are all sinners and deserving of God's judgment and that we have a Savior, offered to us in Christ, that God would provide for our salvation when we do not deserve it, that ought to be a source of real joy. When we think of our sins, we ought to rejoice that there is One, Jesus, who can deliver us from them – from their power and their penalty. When we think of the worth of our soul, we ought to rejoice that there is One who can rescue it from eternal death. When we think of the danger we were in, separated from God and rightly under His wrath, we ought to rejoice that there is One who can and has freed us from that danger.

We ought to rejoice in the sort of Savior Jesus Christ is. We need One to make known to us the way of forgiveness and He does it. We need One to make an atonement for sin, and He does it. We need One to give us peace from a troubled conscience, and He does it. We need One to strengthen us in trials and hardships and He does it. We need One who will be with us in good and in bad, in easier times and hard ones, and He never leaves us nor forsakes us. We need One to give us comfort in death, to bring us to eternal life and He does it.

Our principle joy must and can only be found in Him. Even our temporal blessings, and there are many – our families, friends, jobs, homes, food on the table, clothing, our gifts and talents, our abilities, our minds, recovery from illness, feasts and birthdays, vacations, graduations, babies – all of it, find their full worth and enjoyment as we see them in relation to Christ. We trace them all back to Him. We have a greater and more lasting source of joy – eternal joy – than anyone else in the world and Paul wants to remind the Philippians and us of that fact.

Now look, this is not some blind optimism that Paul is promoting here. I know our lives are filled with real problems, real challenges, real heartbreaks, right? And our hearts break with the sin that we see so prominent and growing worse every day in our world. But as big as some of those things seem to be, we have a greater Savior, with greater promises and greater resources than the sum of all our problems, challenges and heartbreaks, and the destructiveness of sin in this world – Jesus Christ. You stack all of it up at the foot of the cross, and towering over it all is a greater Savior, the greater truth of His faithfulness and love for you, His power and rule over all, His perfect justice and His glory, that is the cause for a joy that more than dispels the greatest cause for discouragement. We have to see that and believe it.

And Paul doesn't find it to be frustrating or annoying to remind the Philippians of all that Christ is, of all that he is telling them in this letter. He's not like the mom or dad who cries out in exasperation, "How many times do I have to tell you this?" I heard that a lot growing up. How do you even answer that? He's not frustrated because he knows that telling them these things over and over are a protection for them. We are never as mature as we think, never beyond needing to be freshly reminded of the truth about Christ again and again. Rejoicing in Christ would serve as a safeguard against everything that would seek to undermine their faith and hope or lure them away from Christ. Nehemiah 8:10 captures this thought pointedly and memorably. There we read: **"The joy of the LORD is your strength."** (Nehemiah 8:10, ESV) The joy of the Lord, finding our joy and satisfaction in Christ, is divine armament making us resistant and resilient to the attacks that would seek to take us down. And that would be very important and here's why, because we live in a world in which real faithfulness to Christ, real satisfaction in Him and the gospel are under attack. That's why Paul tells the Philippians and us to "Look out!"

Look Out! (2) Paul says: **"Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh."** (Philippians 3:2, ESV) Now the very first question we naturally ask is, "Who are these guys?" And the answer to that is that these are three general groups of people, three general ways of thinking and living, three kinds of unbelievers – both religious and non-religious that can steal our joy in Christ, three kinds of people you can find anywhere in the world – especially in Philippi which was known as "little Rome." When Paul tells us to "Look out," he is not saying that we should be afraid of them or avoid them at all costs. We could never be salt and light in the world if that were the case. What he is telling us is not to buy into their way of living, not to adopt their way of thinking, not to be deceived into their worldview. Their way of thinking and living is spiritually deadly. Ok, so who are these folks?

When Paul speaks of "dogs," he is using a typically Jewish term that was used to describe people who were idolaters, people who served a multiplicity of gods and idols. They may or may not be religious, or spiritual, but the point is that their devotion and their worldview, their mindset, is absent any thought of Christ, any thought of the true God of Scripture or any thought of eternity really at all. We live in a world that is characterized by the relentless pursuit of pleasure as an end in itself – pursued in a variety of places – illegitimate sexual relationships, drugs, alcohol abuse, the newest gadgets, possessions, prestige,

entertainment. In fact, entertainment is the defining pursuit of the western culture and why? Because they have no joy, no joy in Christ, so they pursue fun. This world is filled with people like that, living with no sense of God at all. They seem to be having fun, but it is short lived and empty and it leads to destruction. The book of Revelation speaks of their end like this: **“Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.”** (Revelation 22:14–15, ESV) “Look out! Do not be taken in by their way of living and thinking,” Paul is saying, “but find your joy in Christ.”

The second group – the evildoers – is a little more particular. That term was used of people who professed to be followers of Jesus Christ, who claimed to be part of the covenant people of God, but who by their living showed the very opposite. They were the libertines, the licentious, those who used the grace of God as offered in Jesus Christ as an excuse for ungodliness, as an excuse to sin, or who have made an “acknowledgment” of Christ without Him having any real weight in their lives. They would say they believed in Christ but they just lived however they wanted. In 2 Timothy 3, Paul describes this phenomenon in the church saying: **“But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.”** (2 Timothy 3:1–5, ESV)

To combat this thinking, we must have the right perspective on grace – that it is not a license to sin but the gift of God’s strength and power to resist sin and to live holy, God-honoring and God-pleasing lives. God’s grace to us in Christ, the unmerited blessing of redemption, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the work of God to sanctify us rather than cast us away, the adoption as the sons and daughters of God, His multiple mercies, should serve as a motivator, by His empowering grace, to be holy and blameless.

In essence, this group of folks denied the power of the gospel, the power of grace to transform and reshape the desires and pursuits of someone who is saved through faith in Christ. And Malachi describes the end for these seemingly religious people when he describes the contrast between the faithful believer and the one who is not. Speaking of the

true believer he first says: **““They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him. Then he says: “For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts.” (Malachi 3:17–4:3, ESV) “Look out. Don’t use grace as a license to sin and live in manner to satisfy your fleshly desires,” Paul says, “but find your joy in faithfulness to Christ.”**

Then, this last group that Paul mentions – those who mutilate the flesh – is a colorful way of describing the Judaizers – that group of men who dogged Paul’s ministry efforts pretty much everywhere, who said that faith in Jesus Christ was not enough to be saved. You had to do other things, add other works that you performed in order for God to accept you and forgive you – what we call legalists. Now I want you to understand something clearly here, ok? These are not the people who exhort us to holiness and who insist upon growing evidences of grace, who encourage the growth of spiritual graces and the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control – in our lives. Otherwise, you would have to call Paul a legalist and he was certainly not one. A call to holiness or faithfulness is sometimes mislabeled as legalism but it isn’t.

Legalism is the idea of adding to the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, some religious work of your own, in order to make you right with God, in order to earn salvation. Specifically these men said that you had to become a Jew before you could become a Christian. And specifically they were talking about circumcision. They said that salvation depended upon circumcision and keeping all of the ceremonial laws of the OT. They did not deny that Jesus was the Messiah, or that His Gospel was the power of God unto salvation, but they insisted that the Gentile converts could only come to the fullness of Gospel privilege through the Law of Moses; they urged that Gentiles must become Jews before they could be Christians; they asserted that if the new converts were not circumcised after the manner of Moses and did not follow all of the dietary laws and sacrificial laws of the OT, they could not be saved.

The false gospel that these Judaizers were peddling was nothing more than the same old false gospel that has plagued man forever – that we must do something more than trust in Christ to be made right with God, to be forgiven by God. Circumcision in the OT, as it started with Abraham the father of the Jewish faith, was never the means of salvation but only a sign of belonging to God by grace. The hardest thing for fallen men to accept is salvation by grace because we always want to add something to it, we want to earn it, we want to merit it on our own, want to be able to say that we have done something to deserve it. And yet if we persist in trying to add anything to the work of Christ for salvation, we are not saved. To add baptism, church membership, a specific denomination to which we must belong, some specific religious works that must be done in order to be saved, some rules to follow is deadening legalism. That is why Paul refers to them, not as the circumcision, but as the mutilation. They had mutilated the meaning of circumcision. He’s mocking them. “Look out. Don’t try to find your salvation in your own works, in your own merit that you think you can work up with God,” Paul says, “but find your hope and joy in Christ.”

I love Charles Spurgeon’s words here: **There is none other plan by which sinners can be made at one with God, except by Jesus’ precious blood. I may make sacrifices; I may mortify my body; I may be baptized; I may receive sacraments; I may pray until my knees grow hard with kneeling; I may read devout words until I know them by heart... I may worship in one language or in fifty languages; but I can never be at one with God, except by blood; and that blood, the precious blood of Christ. Remember, sinner, it is not thy hold of Christ that saves thee—it is Christ; it is not thy joy in Christ that saves thee—it is Christ; it is not even faith in Christ, though that is the instrument—it is Christ’s blood and merits; therefore, look not to thy hope, but to Christ, the source of thy hope; look not to thy faith, but to Christ the author and finisher of thy faith; and if thou doest that, ten thousand devils cannot throw thee down.**” Spurgeon is so right. All these other things are the world’s substitute for the gospel, the their substitute for the Son of God, their substitute for the Bible. And Paul’s point is that the way to remain untouched, unaffected by these wrong ways of thinking, Paul says, is to...

Remember Who You Are (3) Paul encourages the Philippians and us by giving a powerful reminder of who and what true followers of Christ are: **“For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—”** (Philippians 3:3, ESV)

When he says to the Philippians, **“we are the circumcision,”** He is saying “we are the covenant people of God,” and we have been made the people of God through faith in Christ alone. He is drawing a contrast with the “mutilators,” the legalists that he mentioned before who did not understand the proper role of circumcision.

We are the chosen people of God, born again, saved by faith in Christ’s death and resurrection, individually and collectively the recipients of God’s saving grace and here is how you know. We bear the true marks of salvation, the circumcision that matters -- **“For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter.”** (Romans 2:28–29, ESV) Here is the mark of that salvation on our lives: we **worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.** We are distinct from everyone else in the world. Paul is drawing a distinction between the faithful Christian, the true church, the flock of God, those who truly follow Jesus in more than just words, and everyone else in the world. And there are three marks that he points to.

First, he says, the true Christian is the one who worships by the Spirit of God. We have been made alive from the dead to worship Christ. Worshipping by the Spirit requires a heart that has been made alive by the Spirit of God and a body that is a fit temple for the Holy Spirit. **“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”** (Romans 12:1, ESV) His point is this, Christian living, Christian service, Christian worship is not a one or a two or a three hour a week activity. It’s a twenty-four hour a day, seven day a week activity; it’s a whole life activity. Worship isn’t an activity confined to Sunday morning or Wednesday evening. Our worship, how we live, how we speak, how we reason, how we act, what we give to God, the way that we sing, the way that we pray, the way that we listen to His word, the way that we tell Him what He is worth must be offered to Him as what is most precious, not as something cheap and worthless. Worship involves everything that we are. We are worshippers.

And worshipping by the Spirit of God speaks of the work of the Holy Spirit in us, empowering worship that is acceptable to God, interceding for us. Worship is a holy thing, of the greatest and deepest effect on our souls. You see, you become like what you worship. And as we worship by the Spirit, we will see Christ’s character written into our countenances and into our lives. We will delight in Him, He will be our God and we will be His people. The

real essence of worship is knowing and being satisfied in Christ, prizing and treasuring Christ and expressing that with the whole of our lives. When we see Jesus for who He truly is, we will savor Him, we will delight in Him as true and beautiful and the more we are satisfied in Him, the more Christ will be glorified in us and the more we will be people who have been crucified to this world, but made truly alive by faith in the Son of God. That is who we are. It is far better than what anyone or anything else can offer.

The second mark of someone who is truly a Christian is that they glory in Christ Jesus. We make our boast in Christ, no other idols, no other gods. Our boast, our delight, our joy, our worth, our value is found in Jesus Christ alone. This is a very strong statement from Paul. What you glory in has power over your thinking, your emotions, your disposition, your attitude, your character, etc.

In whom and in what do you boast? Your answer to that is telling indeed. I just saw an article this week about First Baptist Church of Greenville, SC that described their corporate decision, led by their pastor, to stop boasting or glorying in Christ as Lord. They wouldn't say it that way of course. But they have. They have voted to ordain transgender and homosexual people to gospel ministry. They have taken this bold move in order to "embrace the complexities of gender identity." Their pastor said: "What I heard was, "We need to do the right thing, regardless of what anybody thinks or says about us." After a six-month exploratory time, Greenville asked their members to affirm the acceptance of same-sex couples. According to *Greenville Online*, those who didn't affirm the church's decision still remained in the congregation. In moving forward, the church ministers can perform same-sex unions and ordain any person, regardless of sexual orientation and lifestyle, to serve in a leadership role. Listen beloved, that is not boasting in Christ – that's boasting in fallen human wisdom, boasting in rebellion to the authority of Scripture, boasting in sin and rejection of the gospel, boasting in political and cultural correctness.

We must glory in Christ, in His Word, in His gospel, in His Lordship and right to rule over our lives, in His righteousness – in Him alone and especially as we see the casting off of Christ's Lordship in the professing church that is more concerned with being politically and culturally correct than faithful to Christ and biblically faithful. The Christian, no matter what else, always returns to the theme of the greatness of Christ – His greatness as teacher, Savior, King of kings, Lord over all. The true Christian comes to the point where less than Christ can never satisfy him. He is their prophet and they are constantly learning from Him. He is their

Savior and the blood of Jesus Christ God's Son cleanses them from all sin. He is their Shepherd King, guiding, providing, protecting, and working all things for their good. We glory in Christ. I love the way that God through Jeremiah said it: ***“Thus says the Lord: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord.””*** (Jeremiah 9:23–24, ESV)

Then the third mark of a genuine Christian is that they put no confidence in the flesh. That is, we put no confidence for acceptance with God in any natural standing – not in upbringing, talents, possession, traditions, education, wealth, personality – they are all of them irrelevant before God as it concerns our soul's standing with Him. Those things cannot earn favor with God, cannot make us acceptable to God, or more worthy. That mentality dies hard. I know it has in me. For a long time, even after coming to faith in Christ, I wanted to measure myself by me – my leadership skills, my intelligence, my education, my talents – and it is foolish. Everything I am or have, I have by God's grace and all of those things could disappear overnight. My only confidence must be in Christ who is everlasting. This is who we are. We are those who rejoice in Christ, who worship by the Spirit, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh.

Do You Have This Joy In Christ?

Let me ask you today. Do you have that joy in Christ? Some of you here, if you are honest, will admit that you don't. For some of you, the reason that you do not have this joy or these marks is because you do not have Jesus. You may have something in life that appears to be full and satisfying but is not, because the greatest reality of all is absent from your life – the grace of the living God. The guilt of your sin in the sight of a holy God has never been dealt with. But there is a joy which truly is radiant and lasting. Its source is found in an overwhelming awareness of God's love, that He knows all about me, the real me with all my past, and yet He loves me, and receives me as his child, and cares for me. He gives me always what is best for me. And the reason I know this is because He gave His Son, Jesus Christ, to live the life I couldn't live and to die the death that I should have died so that I could be delivered from the judgment I deserved. And the only way to that kind of joy is to come to Jesus Christ in faith and surrender, the one who died for you as the sacrifice for your sin, the one who rose from the dead and reigns as Lord over all. Go to him and plead with Him to

forgive you for your sins, surrender your life to Him and ask of Him to make you a new creature. Come to Him and find joy everlasting.

Maybe for some of you, your joy is slipping because you are buying into what the world is offering. Look out. Remember who you are and live like it. You are one who rejoices in Christ, who worships by the Spirit, who glories in Christ Jesus, and who puts no confidence in the flesh. That's who you are.

For those of us here this morning that can say with confidence that the marks of real faith are present in our lives, that we **worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh**. Our determination should be, then, to grow in these marks of real Christianity, to reject every worldview that would steal our joy in Christ, and to share this gospel without fear with all who need to believe.

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