

REJOICING IN THE LORD - PART 5

Rejoicing in Jesus alone

Dr. Derek Morris

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| Preaching passage: | Philippians 3:1-4:1 |
| Subject: | Where is our confidence for our salvation |
| Complement: | not in ourselves or our works but in Christ Jesus alone. |
| Exegetical idea: | Our confidence for our salvation is not in ourselves or our works but in Christ Jesus alone. |
| Homiletical idea: | Your confidence for salvation is in Jesus alone. |
| Purpose: | To remind my hearers that we can have no confidence for salvation in ourselves or in our own works but only in Christ Jesus and to encourage my hearers to trust wholly in Jesus and rejoice in Him. |

Introduction

Do you ever read the signs that people put in their yards? Some of them are quite humorous. I saw one near Damascus, Maryland. It was right alongside a mailbox that had been attached to a telephone pole, about 20 feet above the ground. And the sign read, "Air Mail!" Then there was a sign that was reportedly placed in the front yard of a funeral home: "Drive Safely..We'll Wait."

Some signs are intended as a witness. There was a sign in someone's front yard not too far from my home in California which read, "Remember thy creator in the days of thy youth." Unfortunately, the language seems rather archaic to connect with young people. What thinkest thou? But maybe someone will read it and understand that it's good for people to get to know God while they're young.

Then there are the intimidating signs, like one that I saw near Pastor Mark's in-laws home in Collegedale, Tennessee. It is attached to a chain link fence in someone's front yard and it reads, "Trespassers will be shot! No questions asked. No warning given." Needless to say, I never visited the folks in that house!

Perhaps the most common sign that you see in peoples' front yards is this one: BEWARE OF THE DOG. Sometimes they will add an "S" just to really scare you: BEWARE OF THE DOGS!" Or they will add the picture of a snarling canine, just in case you can't read!

I'm not that surprised when I see this sign in someone's front yard, but I was really shocked to find this sign in the middle of the Philippian scroll that we've been studying.

If you've been with us for the past few weeks, you will remember that we've been studying Paul's letter to the Christians at Philippi. We began with the testimony of Epaphroditus, and discovered two reasons to rejoice: First we can rejoice because God has started a good work in our lives. That's a reason to rejoice, wouldn't you agree?! God has started a good work in our lives. Praise His holy name. And a second reason to rejoice is this: God, who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it! Hallelujah! Those are two reasons to rejoice.

In the second sermon from this series we discovered that God can work good even in the midst of bad situations. He can work good for those around us, like the members of the Praetorian guard who heard Paul's testimony during his house arrest, and for the members of Caesar's household. God can also work good even in the midst of bad situations for us personally. Paul learned in the midst of his trial to trust wholly in Jesus Christ, and we can learn that lesson too, by God's grace. Yes, God can work good even in the midst of bad situations.

In the third sermon in this series from Philippians we discovered that when you realize how much the Father loves you, when you accept His love so perfectly and completely revealed through Jesus Christ our Lord, you will not only love Him with all your heart and love others more than life itself, but you will be filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy! And that's

good news, what do you say? I'm still singing that old gospel song: "If you want joy, real joy, wonderful joy, let Jesus come into your heart!"

And then in the most recent sermon in this series on "Rejoicing in the Lord" we discovered that we can rejoice together. When we see brothers and sisters in Christ shining like the stars, reflecting the radiance of Jesus Christ, allowing God to work in them according to His good pleasure, we can rejoice together because God is at work in our midst. And we need to take more time to rejoice together, because God *is* at work in our midst. What do you say? We mailed out over 100 of these yellow cards this past week, plus many more that were hand delivered. Those yellow cards of encouragement and affirmation give us an opportunity to rejoice together when we see God at work in our midst. You'll find some in the pew rack in front of you, and I encourage you to write a yellow card to someone today. Let people know that you see them shining like a star for Jesus, and rejoice together.

And now we come to the place in the Philippian letter where Paul almost seems to be drawing to a close. He begins paragraph #3, what we call Ch 3:1, with what sounds like a conclusion. Let's read it together. The first part of paragraph 3. "Finally, my brother, rejoice in the Lord." And it almost sounds like he's finished. Doesn't it?

Then all of a sudden, without any warning, Paul holds up this sign: BEWARE OF THE DOG. The change is so abrupt that some have suggested that most of chapter 3 and the first part of Ch 4 was added later. One commentator suggests that Ch 3:1 and Ch 4:4 "fit together so exactly that upon sober reflection one must come to the conclusion that a later hand has pulled the two verses apart." [Walter Schmithals, *Paul and the Gnostics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), p. 72]

So, did an over zealous copyist add the section we're going to study this morning? I don't believe so. First, there is absolutely no manuscript evidence to suggest that this portion of the letter was added later. The third paragraph of this letter is found in all of the manuscripts of Paul's letter to the Philippians. Secondly, if an over-zealous editor was desiring to add a personal interpolation, why would he or she make the transition so abrupt? If anything, there would be an attempt to make the transition smooth. Wouldn't you agree. So I don't think this section is added by someone else. There is every reason to believe that this is Paul's work, given to us under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

So, why does Paul make such an abrupt shift? And what is Paul talking about here? Apparently it's very important, because he just has to address this issue before closing his letter. It's almost as if he paused for a moment after writing the first sentence of the third paragraph, thought carefully and prayerfully for some time, and then decided that this portion of the letter had to be included.

Let's read Paul's words together, at the beginning of the third paragraph of his letter to the Philippians. Beginning with the word "finally". "....." Those are strong words! The imperative "look," "watch out" or "beware" is actually included three times in the Greek. Watch out for those dogs, watch out for those men who do evil, watch out for those mutilators of the flesh. And it's a present imperative, which implies ongoing action. Watch out, and keep on watching out. Beware and continue to beware.

So who are these people that the apostle Paul calls "dogs", workers of evil, and mutilators of the flesh? Well this is not the first time that Paul has mentioned them in his writings. In his letter to the Christians in Corinth, Paul has some more strong words for these "dogs," these

workers of evil. In 2 Cor 11:13, Paul calls these individuals “false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ.” 2 Cor 11:13

These “dogs” as Paul calls them are pretending to be part of the Christian community. They are masquerading as apostles of Christ. But actually they are “men who do evil,” “deceitful workmen.” Paul also speaks of these false apostles in his letter to the Christians in Galatia. Listen to Paul’s stern words in Gal 1:6-9. “.....” Literally, “let him be anathema!”

So what was this false gospel that these supposed followers of Christ were preaching? We find a clue in our Philippian scroll. What did Paul say? Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil...but notice the next phrase: “those mutilators of the flesh.” These “dogs”, as Paul calls them, were Jews who were teaching that faith in Jesus Christ was not enough for salvation. There was something else that *you* had to do. You also needed to adhere to Jewish laws and traditions. And so, among other things, they taught that a male convert to Christianity would need to be circumcised. Now Paul was a faithful Jew, but listen to his rejection of this false gospel in Gal 5:1-6. “.....”

Paul is really upset with these individuals that he calls “dogs”. Listen to his comment in Gal 5:12. “As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves.” Those are startling words to find in Scripture. Paul is filled with a holy indignation. A righteous anger. These “dogs” are distorting the gospel of Jesus Christ. Salvation does not come through faith in Jesus Christ plus what we do. Our confidence is not in ourselves, who we are, what we’ve done, or haven’t done. Our confidence is in Jesus alone.

Many have wondered about Paul’s use of the term “dog” to describe these enemies of the

cross. It sounds so harsh. Some have suggested that Paul uses this term because dogs were considered shameless and unclean. But it may be that Paul is using a term that was common in Judaism and is turning it upside down. You see, the Jews used this term “dog” in reference to Gentiles, people whom they considered to be outside of the covenant, beyond the grace of God. And Paul may well be saying, “These Gentiles who trust in Jesus alone for salvation without all of the laws and traditions of Judaism, they are not the dogs. *You* are the dogs. You are the ones who are outside of God’s grace. You are trusting in something or someone other than Jesus alone for your salvation.

And then Paul begins to reflect on his own life. He remembers how he used to have confidence in himself, who he was, what he had done. We can read his thoughts on line #4 of paragraph 3. Beginning with the words “if anyone...” Let’s read together. “.....” Paul says, “if pedigree was of any worth in terms of salvation, I’d have it made!” Or if zealous performance of works of righteous would save me, I’d be knocking on heaven’s doors. But...says Paul. But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.”

His confidence for salvation is in Jesus alone. His assurance of salvation is based on Jesus alone. He says, “Your family pedigree is of no saving value. Your works of righteousness, however zealously they have been performed, are of no saving value.” Salvation comes from above, received by faith. Our confidence is not in ourselves, who we are, what we’ve done, or haven’t done. Our confidence is in Jesus alone.

But someone might say, “What about the commandments of God? Isn’t it important to keep the ten commandments?” Absolutely. But my assurance of salvation has nothing to do with my commandment keeping. We keep the commandments because we love Jesus. Not in

order to have assurance of salvation. Didn't Jesus say, "If you love me, keep my commandments"? And to those who claimed a relationship with Him, "Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and not do the things I say?" Obedience is not unimportant. But it is the fruit of our relationship with Jesus. We place no confidence for salvation in who we are, what we have done, or not done. Our confidence is in Jesus alone.

Well then, if our confidence for salvation is in Jesus alone, what is there left for us to do? Paul answers that question for us. Look with me at the end of line #9 in this third paragraph of Paul's letter to the believers at Philippi. It begins with the words "I want to know Christ....." Let's read it together. "....." Paul says, "Because my confidence is in Jesus alone, I will make knowing Jesus the passion of my life. I will press on. "Not that I have already obtained all this....."

And what is the prize? Is it just living forever? Is that the prize? Is it just avoiding eternal death? Is that the prize? No! The prize is eternal life with Jesus, our wonderful Savior and Lord. The prize is being with Him forever. "Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 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. Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and my crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!"

If I were to sum up Paul's message in this portion of his letter in one sentence it would be this: your confidence for salvation is not in yourself, who you are, what you've done, or haven't done—Your confidence is in Jesus alone.

Someone here might be thinking, "But pastor, I'm really struggling with a sinful thoughts

or sinful habits in my life. Don't I have to overcome all of those problems before I can be saved? What does the Bible say? 1 John 1:9 "If we confess our sins..." Friend, if you are struggling with thoughts or habits that are out of harmony with the will of God, and out of harmony with the Word of God, then turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth....will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace.

Don't let anyone steal your joy by trying to turn your attention toward you. Turn your eyes upon Jesus. On one occasion, Pastor Morri Venden was speaking to a group of Christians about rejoicing in Jesus alone. And after one of the meetings, a man came to him who was struggling with an addiction to alcohol. It could have been an addiction to smoking, or an addiction to pornography, or an addiction to gambling. But it was an addiction to alcohol. And this brother said to Pastor Venden, "I've tried, but I just can't get the victory!" And do you know what Pastor Venden told him? "Will you promise me that you'll spend time every day focusing on Jesus, drawing closer to Jesus?" And the man said, "But what about my problem?"

Do you see this brother's real problem? It wasn't the alcohol problem. The real problem was focusing on his problem, rather than focusing on Jesus. He needed to focus his attention on Jesus. But, you ask, what happens if we stumble? Just get up. Confess your sin, and keep focusing on Jesus. Because Jesus is the author and the finisher of our faith. Yes, He is. Your confidence is not in yourself, who you are, what you've done or haven't done. Your confidence is in Jesus alone.

Well, a year went by and Pastor Venden saw this man again. And the brother said, "It worked! It worked!" Ah, yes, my friends! There is victory in Jesus. There is deliverance in Jesus. There is freedom in Jesus. There is healing in Jesus. Turn your eyes upon Jesus. And if

someone comes up to you and tries to steal your peace and joy because you are still a work in progress, just hold up this sign! Your confidence is not in yourself. Who you are. What you've done. Or what you haven't done. Your confidence is in Jesus alone!

And that's why I want to encourage you to spend more and more time with Jesus, getting to know Jesus better as your best friend. Because that's where we need to focus our attention. I brought a box of books with me this morning. It's my favorite book on the life of Jesus. Do you sense the need to spend more time focusing on Jesus? Do you need to take your eyes off of yourself and turn your eyes upon Jesus? Then I want to invite you to come up after the service and get a copy of this book. I'll give you a copy of this book if you'll promise to read it. And may we always remember that our confidence for salvation is not in ourselves, who we are, what we've done, or haven't done. Our confidence is in Jesus alone.