

## The Difference Easter Makes

*Philippians 3:1-11*

### Introduction

What is so significant about celebrating the resurrection? What difference does it really make?

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### Read Philippians 3:1-11

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### Exposition

#### I. God Desires Our Joy in Him (Vs. 1)

C. S. Lewis once wrote, "Joy is the serious business of heaven." His point was that contrary to what society typically thinks, God is not interested in minimizing our happiness, He desires to maximize our happiness. In **Psalm 37:4**, God commands our joy, saying, "Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart." And in **Psalm 16:11**, we read, "In Your presence is fullness of joy, and at your right hand are pleasure forevermore." **Psalm 43:4** speaks of the "exceeding joy" that we find in God. In the New Testament, we find the apostle Paul praying in **Romans 15:13**, saying, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing." Our God desires our joy and He desire it to be found in Him!

Hence, as we see in this verse, joy is commanded by God through the apostle Paul. We are told, "Rejoice in the LORD!" Now, in order to for us to full appreciate this command from Paul, we have to understand something about situation that the Philippian church found themselves in. The Philippians, like Paul, were enduring suffering because of their faithfulness to Jesus. They were giving sacrificially to the work of the ministry. They were willing to suffering physically and socially for the sake of the gospel. They spent long hours interceding for Paul in prayer. Yet, in the midst of all their labors and suffering, they were commanded to be full of joy in the Lord. And they were. They were a joy-filled people in the LORD!

Have you ever known a person like this? A person that exhibited great joy, even in the midst of their sorrows? Scripture speaks of such people in **Hebrews 10:34**, referring to Christians who "had compassion on those in prison, and who joyfully accepting the plundering of their property, since they knew that they themselves had a better possession and an abiding one."

Church history also recounts of such people of joy in the midst of suffering. One such example from Eusebius of Caesarea, who, when threatened with punishment and even death by Emperor Valens, declared, "He needs not fear confiscation, who has nothing to lose; nor banishment, to whom heaven is his country; nor torments, when his body can be destroyed at one blow; nor death, which is the only way to set him at liberty from sin and sorrow."

**Philippians 3:1** teaches us that when our joy is in God, when it is in Him, it is unshakeable. God desires our joy to be found in Him above all other things in this world.

**T.S. - In a moment, we will see why this is the case, but for now, we move on to verses 2-3, where we find that not does God desire our joy, he also...**

## **II. God Defines Our Identity in Him (Vss. 2-3)**

In the first century, the identity of an individual was closely tied to their relationships with others. So for instance, you were not simply an individual, you were a Roman Citizen or a Jew or a member of Maccabees family or a Pharisee or a slave or a soldier in the Praetorian guard. And while our culture is much more individualistic than previous cultures, we still find our identity in things and organizations outside of ourselves. And while none of this is explicitly wrong, when we allow something other than God to shape our identity, we will find ourselves deeply distraught, disappointed, and even depressed. We were not ultimately made to find our identity in something other than God. We were made to be His "image-bearers," to represent Him, to find our value and worth in being His creation and His child, but the world simply offers so many distracting alternatives.

This is what Paul was facing in verses 2-3 and what he was warning the church about – beware of those that would attempt to undermine your identity in Jesus Christ. Beware of those that would suggest that your real value is found in what you do in the flesh as opposed to your real value being found in what God has done for you in Christ Jesus. For Christians, God defines their identity, not their work, not their family, not their citizenship, not their tax bracket, not their education, not their children, not their spouse, but God in Christ! You are not the clothes you wear, the house you live in, or the car you drive. You are not the number of children that you have or do not have. You are, if you trust Him, a child of God through Jesus Christ!

For the church in Philippi, they were being tempted to find their identity in religious activity that was devoid of spiritual life. They were being tempted to believe that were God's children on the basis of their own efforts instead of the efforts of Jesus Christ, but Paul would not have it! He stressed to them that their identity was ultimately defined by God in Jesus Christ.

**T.S. – Thus far, we have learned that our efforts (both good and bad) do not ultimately define our identity, rather God defines our identity as Christians. Also, we have seen that God has arranged this so that our joy might be found in Him. Now, we will see Paul's warning against any attempts to abandon these realities and see the basis of our hope...**

### III. All Our Efforts Are Vain Apart from Him. (Vss. 4-7)

Having stressed the importance of finding their identity and joy in God through Jesus Christ, Paul digresses for a few moments to give a testimony of his former life. If anyone ever had the ability to boast in themselves, it was Paul, yet, he found that all his efforts apart from Christ were in vain. They were empty. They didn't bring the joy or the identity that he so desired.

As Paul recounts his life in verses 4-7, we see that Paul religiously active but spiritually dead. He knew all the right answers according to those around him. He had the right pedigree. He had the connection. He had everything that he ever wanted, yet he was still empty. So, when he encountered Christ on the road to Damascus, everything changed forever! He recognized the vanity, the emptiness of the life that he was living and turned away from it all, counting it as loss for the sake of Christ. Let me just ask you, "Have you ever come to this point? Have you ever recognized that all your efforts are vain apart from Christ? Have you ever seen that all the things that you hold dear will not ultimately satisfy you?" This is what happened to Paul. He recognized that everything he once valued was worthless if it meant losing Christ.

This is what we must do as well! We must see all of our attempts to be happy and to find an identity outside of Jesus are vain! A promotion is not going to satisfy your soul like Jesus will. A bigger house, nicer car, better politicians and government, and more religious activity mean nothing without Jesus!

**T.S. - So what did Paul do, he forsook everything in order that he might know Christ, which is what we find in the final section of this passage, where we find...**

### IV. All Our Hopes Are Empty Apart from Him. (Vss. 8-11)

Prior to encountering Jesus, Paul was banking on his religious activity to bring him happiness, identity, and eternal life. But all of his hopes were empty apart from Jesus. All of the things that he thought were valuable were actually worthless. All of the things he hoped in left him disappointed and striving for more. But when Jesus stepped in, when Christ revealed himself to Paul, everything changed!

Instead of finding satisfaction outside of Christ, Christ became the object of Paul's affection and pursuit. It did not matter what Paul had to lose in order to follow Christ. He counted everything as loss in order to know Him. Now, some of you may be thinking, but preacher, "Why would Paul give up everything that he once valued in order to know this Jesus character? Why not just live for your passions now and die? We are all going to die right?" This is true, we are all going to die and many of the things that we have worked for in this life will just waste away here on the earth while we are placed into the earth. But some things will remain, and they will remain forever, and those are the things that belong to us in Jesus Christ! Which is why Paul said, "I have suffered the loss of all things in order that I might know the main thing, the most important thing, the greatest things, that I might know Jesus Christ and the power of His resurrection!

Do you realize what Paul is saying? Paul is saying that in light of eternity, there are some things worth hanging on to and some things worth letting go of in order to know Jesus Christ. And my great fear is that many professing Christians in our day and age want Jesus alongside of all the other things. They want to serve two masters. They want to have Jesus and all of the things that undermine their ultimate allegiance to Him. They want Jesus as gift-giver but not the gift itself.

**T.S. - But not the apostle Paul, he wanted Christ above everything! Is this true of you today? Do you realize that the most important things in this life are the things that we do not lose when we die? Do you realize that you have an eternal soul that can be forfeited on account of temporary stuff? Can you say, "Yes and amen," with the apostle Paul, "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord?"**

### Conclusion

Everything we Work for and Hope in will continue to leave us empty and longing for more if we do not know Jesus Christ.

All of the temporary things that we have to lay aside in order to follow Christ are worth losing in light of the power of His resurrection. The things that truly matter in this life are the things that we continue to enjoy in eternity because of Christ's resurrection which makes our resurrection to life certain! This is one of greatest benefits of our Easter season, we get the opportunity to reflect upon what really matters – the life that we have now and for eternity through Jesus Christ! And our possession of that resurrection life now should, in fact, it must, direct the way we live!

### **Application**

Someone here is attempting looking for joy and their identity in something other than Christ,

Maybe you are looking for joy in your job, in your marriage, in your job,  
Maybe you are here and you are struggling with a feeling of emptiness, like something is missing, it might be a spouse, it might be infertility, it might be financial security,  
Maybe you are in the grip of addiction,

Quit trying to find your identity and joy in something other than Jesus. It will not satisfy you. It cannot satisfy you. You were made for the joy and satisfaction of heaven!

Someone here is in the midst of great sorrow and pain,

Maybe you are enduring another Easter without a loved one  
Maybe you are on the brink of total collapse,  
Maybe you are exhausted and hurting,

Come to Jesus this morning, bring your sorrows and pain to Him, ask him to heal the hurt and give you hope in light of His resurrection that you might be able to endure.

Someone here is wondering if everything that they have encountered and lost for the sake of Christ is really worth it,

Decisions made at work that were ethical but not well received  
Decisions to endure a difficult relationship because of your obedience to Christ,  
Decisions to follow Christ when nobody understands

Jesus is worth it! He is worthy of your obedience. You do not need validation from anyone else. For one day, you, like He, will rise again, fully vindicated in your abandonment of the things of this world, ready to receive the reward He has promised to those who persevere and endure in order to know Him and the power of his resurrection!