

Evaluating Your Relationship to Christ, Part 1

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 90-65

As I was thinking about what I might speak to you about on this Sunday, I began to muse in my own mind over the matter of knowing Christ. And I don't mean that in just the saving sense. As I have been going through the situations in my own life and in the life of our family, with Patricia having broken her neck and with all of the complications there and all of the other things that have come to pass, I have found that the strength that I find through all of this is in my personal relationship to Christ. And I really have come to the conviction again, something I've always believed and always affirmed and I trust always cultivated but need to emphasize, that the heart and soul of all Christianity is our relationship with Christ. Sometimes it takes severe trial and trauma to drive us back to Him. It shouldn't but it does.

And though Christianity can be defined in its institutional terms as churches and organizations, it can be defined in its creedal terms as theologies and doctrinal statements, it can be defined in its practical terms as ministries, modes of service, operations, Christianity can be defined in a number of ways even the principles of the Christian faith can be reduced to formulas, concepts, outlines. Our Christianity can become little more than a Sunday morning or a Sunday night service, a little more than a perfunctory prayer at a table before we eat a meal, a little more than a cursory blitz through a daily devotional book, our Christianity becomes very often a series of activities in which we engage ourselves that are put down on a piece of paper called a calendar and effectively we do them because they're there and we have duty to do them.

In the midst of all of these things somehow we lose touch with the personal relationship with the living Christ. And our relationship with Him ceases to grow, it ceases to flourish, it ceases to be warm and intimate. The communion becomes more infrequent. Prayer takes a back place. And we lose out on the very heart of our faith because when all is said and done, Christianity is a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. It is having a deep and intimate, living, growing relationship with the Lord.

And I have found in my life that no matter what comes, if that relationship is strong there is joy and there is peace and there is strength and hope. I admit we teach here, we teach truth, we teach doctrine, we emphasize theology. We teach you principles for ministry and principles for life. We have structured systems and organizations and programs and training efforts in our church. We worship. We sing songs and we listen to great music. We fellowship together a myriad of ways. And all of that has a place, but its place is to stimulate the relationship. And so the question this morning that I want to ask you is a very simple one...what is the current condition of your relationship to Christ?

I'm not asking you whether you come to church regularly. I'm not asking you whether your theology is correct. I'm not asking you whether you're involved in a ministry. I'm not asking you whether you understand how to communicate the gospel, whether you listen to Christian radio, read good books, or even listen to tapes. I'm asking you...what is the condition of your personal intimate relationship with Christ? On what level does that relationship currently exist?

As I was thinking through that, it...it became apparent to me that that is a lost concern in contemporary Christianity. Generally when something goes wrong in a Christian's life he is told to look deep within himself, not to pursue a deep and intimate relationship with the living Christ. I've looked deep within myself a couple of times, it wasn't really very interesting. It wasn't productive. It didn't help. I learned a long time ago when the normal circumstances that trouble life come along I'm not interested in finding me, I'm interested in finding Him. But why does it take the troubles of life to force us into those kinds of zealous pursuits of Christ?

I picked up a copy of "Christianity Today" not necessarily a magazine you need to subscribe to but sometimes there are interesting things in it. And as I was reading through it, it struck me. And I said to someone, "You know, this magazine is nothing short of shocking as a commentary on what its title is, 'Christianity Today'" In a period of about eight pages the reader is exposed to contemporary Christianity. And I know the editors didn't really intend to do this, it just is there and that's the way it is.

The first thing that I saw right in the middle of this magazine around page 46 or 47 was an ad for a new book, a helpful book, by the way, entitled Churches That Abuse. And this is what the ad says, "A child is forced to repent for playing with dolls. A family is disciplined for taking an unauthorized vacation. A congregation is ordered to destroy their TV sets. These aren't the radical actions of an extremist cult, they're the decrees of Bible-believing churches that have drifted into patterns of legalism and spiritual intimidation." The ad goes on. "In churches that abuse, Ronald Enroth(?), the author, identifies dangers and early warning signs of misguided shepherding and oppressive church leadership. He offers much needed hope and healing for those being hurt by the very ones they trust. This highly readable expose' and compassionate guide will hold your interest from cover to cover and help you reach out to those in emotional and spiritual turmoil." That's the end of the ad.

What kind of condition are those pastors and leaders in who are turning their shepherding role into an abusive kind of treatment? I asked myself the question...those people caught in that kind of legalism, those people who are supposed to be shepherding the sheep and instead they are cutting them up, they say they're the pastors and the leaders and the elders and the servants of Christ. But I want to ask them a question...what is the current condition of your personal relationship to Jesus Christ...because that is not how He treats His own.

I turned the page to find an expose' of one of the major personalities and ministries in our country, a well-known leader and his ministry who was being exposed because of financial improprieties, taking in money for the purpose of compassionately dispensing it to the poor and the needy around the world. The accusation of the article was that instead of doing that it was going into his own bank account into his own pocket. And if I had the opportunity I would want to ask that gentleman...what is the condition of your relationship to Jesus Christ? His theology may be right, his ministry may be highly structured and highly organized and financially solvent, that isn't the issue. The issue is what kind of relationship do you have with Christ that allows you to spend money on yourself at the expense of those in need?

I turned the page again and found there was a report about a certain seminary professor in one of the better seminaries who had defected and gone into the "signs and wonders movement." And the question I ask in my mind is not what happened to his theology, but what happened to his relationship. Because if you have the right relationship with Jesus Christ and if it is intimate and if it is rich and vital and growing, you're not going to defect into error.

I read a little further and there was the report in the same issue on the same page about a well-known pastor and radio Bible teacher that many of you know who confessed to sexual impropriety, something he has been doing apparently for over a decade while pastoring. And I remember back to when I preached his installation in that church. There's nothing wrong that I know of in terms of the church organization, his theology is evangelical, there is something vastly wrong in his personal relationship with Jesus Christ because if you're rightly related to Jesus Christ you don't go on committing sexual sin.

That's the state of Christianity. We've got the means and the methods, the question is...do we have the relationship? And then there was a new book in this same section of "Christianity Today" that noted a certain author who had written this book, the book is an attack on legalism and legalism rightly should be attacked. I don't know the quality of the book, but it's the right thing to attack. Legalism means you can please God by the external rather than the internal. This pastor who had written that book to expose legalism was then booted out of his denomination. What kind of leaders in a denomination settle for a legalistic, external approach to Christianity that is the antithesis of a vital internal relationship with Christ?

And then I read a rather long significant article on the next page about a well-known youth speaker, I have been on the same program with him in the past, who has for many years declared himself a former Satanist priest and has parlayed his former involvement in Satanistic cults into a preaching and teaching career, testimony career and more recently into becoming a leading quote/unquote "Christian comedian." This article said that the entire testimony and the entire story about the Satanic priesthood is nothing but a lie and a fabrication. Not only has he been lying about his whole life and trading on this lie for a long time in his ministry, but also he has had multiple adulteries, has had three

divorces and has now already married his fourth wife while a book written between he and his third wife is just now coming out. And the question you have to ask is...Look, what kind of relationship does this person have with Jesus Christ? What is the great compelling force in holiness and purity and devotion and service and ministry? It is my relationship to Christ.

And then there was an article about the Plymouth Brethren, those paragons of biblical virtue who have upheld the integrity of Scripture for years and who believe every jot and tittle to the nth degree. And it tells us in this article that two groups of Plymouth Brethren are suing each other for \$30 million. Have they somehow skipped some chapters in 1 Corinthians? And you ask yourself the question...what is the current relationship of these kinds of people to Christ?

Do you understand what I'm driving at? The compelling issue in Christian living is my relationship to Christ. And in the midst of trials, and in the midst of troubles and difficulties, that relationship becomes my strength and my joy and my peace. To pursue a kind of Christianity that is external and structural and creedal and anything else but that lacks the growing deep intimate personal communion with Christ is to miss the whole point and to set yourself up for spiritual disaster.

I really don't know whether Christians for the most part today even think about that. They get caught up in the slick kind of Christianity that we have today and forget the person of Christ. They don't want Him, they want what He can give. When they have a problem, it isn't that they want to draw close to Him and enjoy His sweet comfort, it's that they want Him immediately to deliver them from the problem. They want not Him they want only what He can do for them. They are much more interested in the gifts than in the giver. They are more interested in the benefits than the benefactor. They are more interested in the stuff than they are the source. And they are more interested in themselves than they are the Lord.

Christians today are preoccupied with themselves. They've lost the vision of Christ. Even the Paul in 2 Corinthians says if you don't gaze into the glory of the Lord, you can't be transformed into His image from one level of glory to the next.

Paul understood that. He understood that the heart of the Christian life was Christ and that building an intimate knowledge of Christ was what was the goal. Look at Philippians chapter 3 with me and I want to draw you back to a marvelous text, and we're going to look at it this morning and then finish it up tonight. And in it the Apostle Paul really calls us back to this perspective. And I don't want you to hold this thing at arm's length, I want to ask you the question...what is the current condition of your relationship to Jesus Christ? And that's the question I want you to answer as we look at this text.

In verse 8 is the key phrase. The thing that consumed Paul was the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. That was his passion. And down in verse 14 when he says, "I press toward the goal," that was the goal he was pressing toward...to know Christ and in knowing Christ intimately and

personally to therefore become like Him. And verse 10 he says it simply that I may know Him...that I may know Him.

You know, beloved, that's how it all started really. That's how it all started. At some point in your life you came to a place where you wanted to know Christ. You determined that knowing Christ was more precious than anything else, that knowing Christ was more valuable than anything else, that Christ Himself was the supreme object of your affection. You wanted to know Him and to love Him and to honor Him and to serve Him and obey Him and commune with Him and follow His voice. And you wanted to be like Him.

There was a time when your pursuit of Jesus Christ was desperate. You wanted Him to change you, to save you, to transform you, to forgive you, to make you His child. You wanted to know His joy and His love and His peace. You wanted to know His wisdom and His understanding. You wanted to know His mercy and His grace. You wanted to know His endurance and His patience. You wanted to know His gentleness, His meekness, His comfort. Do you still want that?

You could never say, "Well I've already got it," because the resources that are in Christ are eternally inexhaustible. Paul says my life boils down to this, I am consumed with the surpassing value of knowing Christ. I don't care about knowing me and I don't care really as much about knowing you after a point. What I care about is knowing Christ. He is my pursuit. When I read the Scripture it isn't that I might know what it says, it is that I might know the one whom it reveals. It is to know Christ.

Go back with me for a moment to Matthew chapter 13 and here is a good point at which to sort of launch our understanding of Philippians. In Matthew 13 and verse 44 through 46, Jesus gave some very simple and direct parables, easy to understand. Verse 44 he said, "The Kingdom of heaven is like a treasure, hidden in the field which a man found and hid. And from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." What's the point? The point is this man found something so valuable that he set it apart until he could go and get everything he had and come, lay down everything he had in exchange for this. Here was a greater treasure than everything he had.

Verse 45, Jesus further says, "The Kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls. And upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it." Here is the same kind of principle in a different story. Here is a man who goes and he finds a pearl that is so valuable, its price is incalculable. He sells everything he has for that pearl. The treasure is Christ and the pearl is Christ.

He is saying that when a person comes to conversion, when a person comes into the Kingdom, it is because they find Jesus Christ to be extremely attractive...more valuable than anything they possess, more precious than any commodity. And they are willing to take everything they have accumulated and set it aside to have Christ. And that is the surpassing value of knowing Christ. That's what a man

will give in exchange for his soul, according to Matthew 16:26. He will lay aside everything he's accumulated and say I want the pearl, I want the treasure. The person who truly comes to Christ is willing to exchange anything and everything he has to gain Christ.

Now this is particularly true in the religious area. And I think that's what the Lord is talking about in this parable and I think that's what Paul is talking about in Philippians chapter 3. Paul was a man whose primary riches were religious. He came out of the people of God, Israel. He had all the religious background, tradition and credentials. He was capable of some hunger for God. He was a man who surely had passed from one stall to another in the marketplace of religion and was looking for the best and had been convinced that at least as far as he could tell nothing offered in the secular world was as good as what he had in his Jewish heritage. Until God forced him to see the gem. Until God forced him to see the pearl, the treasure. And he gladly sacrificed everything he had because it was so precious.

Unfortunately the rich young ruler wouldn't make that exchange. But Paul would. Paul's vision of Christ that he was given by God led him to conclude that everything he possessed was trash. Go back to Philippians chapter 3 and that's what he says. The end of verse 8 he says, "I count it all but rubbish," could be translated trash, it could be translated garbage, it could be translated manure, it could be and has been translated dung. Here was a man who had spent his life accumulating religious treasure. And when he saw Christ, Christ was more attractive, more wonderful, more precious than all of that combined. And, you see, Paul had zealously pursued all this religion. It consumed the man. And now Christ will consume him.

Paul looks back and identifies the worthless things. Look at verses 4 to 6, the worthless things. And they're pretty heavy credentials. Although he says in verse 4, "I myself might have confidence even in the flesh." I mean, if I wanted to I could certainly boast about my religious accomplishments. "If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more." In other words, if you want to start stacking up religious credentials, folks, I think I can stand against anyone. He was a devout Jew. And in terms of Judaism he had every reason to boast. If you want to compare religious credentials and you want to compare religious achievement, I'll stack mine up against anybody's, including the Judaizers attacking these Philippians. He had some heavy credentials.

But what he came to realize was they were not worth anything. They were the worthless things. Why? Because they couldn't save, they couldn't produce righteousness. They couldn't produce spiritual power. They couldn't produce spiritual endurance. And they couldn't lead him to eternal life and glory. He was a Jew in the highest sense of devotion possible. But none of it impressed God and it came to the point where it didn't impress him either and he trashed it all. He trashed it all.

He reminds us of what his credentials were. Look with me at verse 5 and in so reminding us gives us some insight. First of all, he learned that salvation is not by ritual. Salvation is not by ritual. There are

people who believe that if you go through certain rituals, certain sacraments, certain rites you're going to gain salvation. Paul said the first in my list of trash is that I was circumcised the eighth day. I want you to know, folks, that I went through the strict Jewish ritual. I am no proselyte. I am no Johnny-come-lately Ishmaelite. I am a true-blooded religious Jew, faithful to the cardinal ritual at birth. I have been nursed and raised and reared in the ancestral religion and all of its ceremonies. I have been born into the Jewish faith and I've gone through all the rites and rituals and it is manure. It cannot save. It cannot make me righteous. It cannot forgive my sins. It cannot empower me to live godly. It cannot bring me endurance and patience and spiritual struggle. It cannot bring me to glory. Salvation is not by ritual.

Secondly, he says salvation is not by race. Not only was he circumcised the eighth day but he was of the nation of Israel. The Jews believed that if they were born into the nation Israel and they were out of the loins of Abraham, that constituted salvation. That put them in the Kingdom. Paul says, "Look, I came from the loins of Abraham through Isaac, through Jacob, pure descent, no Ishmaelite, no Edomite here. But the fact that I was born a Jew is nothing when it comes to salvation. Oh it has its human benefits. Genetically the Jews are a noble people and they have a wonderful tradition. And it may put you into a wonderful family. But in terms of salvation it is useless, it is worthless. It is to be trashed as a means of redemption.

Thirdly in listing his credentials he reminds us that salvation is not by rank. It's not by rank. He says, "I am also of the tribe of Benjamin." Benjamin was the younger son of Rachel, Jacob's favorite wife. Benjamin was a favored child and a favored tribe. Benjamin was the only son born in the promise land, according to Genesis 35. Benjamin had unique military priority in being given the front line in battle, according to Judges 5. Benjamin gave Israel their first king, Saul, who was a Benjamite. Benjamin's territory did include Jerusalem and so they had that marvelous city in their own land. Benjamin, you remember, was loyal to David when the kingdom split and Benjamin and Judah then founded the two tribes that made up the southern kingdom while all the rest defected. It was Benjamin even who gave Mordecai to the nation, Mordecai who was used to save the Jews from genocide, according to Esther chapter 2.

Benjamin was a very special tribe, loyal, faithful, noble, maintaining high rank and status, a noble religious heritage. But it didn't help. It didn't help. It was useless for salvation. Ritual, race, rank mean nothing. They don't impress God. They impressed Paul for a long time until he saw the pearl, until he saw the treasure. And by comparison, this stuff was trash.

Fourthly, he says salvation is not by tradition. In verse 5 he says, "I was a Hebrew of Hebrews." What does he mean? I'm a Hebrew son of Hebrew parents. I followed my father's tradition, is what he means. He was a traditional Jew. He maintained the traditions of his families. He wasn't Hellenized. In other words, he wasn't swayed by Greek culture and pulled away from his heritage. He didn't abandon his language. He didn't abandon his tradition. Though he had been raised in pagan Tarsus,

not far from Galatia which was a seat of Greek culture, he never abandoned his Jewish tradition. He had come to Jerusalem, you'll remember, to learn from the great Jewish teacher Gamaliel. He could speak Hebrew and he knew the Jewish customs and observed them. He was loyal to his religious tradition. But God was not impressed. And since seeing Christ, neither was Paul.

And then he says going down to verse 5 at the end, salvation is not by religion. Salvation is not by religion. He says, "As to the law, I was a Pharisee." That would be like saying, "I'm a Roman Catholic and I've gone into the priesthood. I'm dead serious about this." The Pharisees were the advocates of the strictest purest code of morality. They were the ones who always advocated outward piety, study of Scripture and strictly interpreted the law. There were about 6,000 of them. They were radically devoted to the Jewish religion. So when it came to religion, he made the maximum move to the highest level. And God was not impressed. And when he saw Jesus, he wasn't either.

And then he adds in the next verse that salvation is not by sincerity. Look at verse 6. How sincere was he? He was so sincere that as to zeal he became a persecutor of the church. He saw Christianity as a heresy to be stamped out. He was so zealous for Judaism that he wanted to kill Christians. It's one thing to disagree with Christians, it's another thing to attack them verbally, it's another thing to attack their theology. It's something else to attack them physically. And that's where he was. He was devout, zealous, sincere to the point where he wanted to kill Christians. Relentless in his zeal, in his sincerity, in his sacrifice, depriving himself, inflicting pain and difficulty in his own life in order to accomplish the zealous task of preserving the Jewish religion. He looked at his zeal one time in his life and said this is very valuable, this impresses God. And then he saw Christ and he knew God wasn't impressed and neither was he.

And then in verse 6 he says salvation is not by law righteousness. He says, "As to the righteousness which is in the law, I was found blameless." Outwardly he said I conformed to the law. If you looked at my life you'd say he was keeping the law. On the inside he was full of dead men's bones because he wasn't truly regenerate. But on the outside he maintained the external code and there was nobody who could blame him for some violation of God's law. He impressed people with his morality, with his human goodness. He put on a great performance on the outside. And he thought God was impressed until he saw Christ and then it was garbage.

And so, what we see in these verses is a man who is ready to give up everything. And what is it that's drawing him? He sees Christ. There is nothing to compare with Christ...absolutely nothing. All of this stuff is trash compared to Christ. And so he turns from the worthless things to the worthy one. Look at verse 7. "But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ." I gave it all up. I gave it all away when I saw the glory of Christ. When I saw the beauty of Christ, I wanted Christ. I wanted to know Him deeply and intimately. And I realized that my ritual and my race and my rank and my tradition and my religion and my sincerity and my works were trash compared to the beauty of Christ. All my assets were liabilities. They only increased my unpayable

debt and they gave me the illusion of a right standing before God. And then he says, "For the sake of Christ I trashed them all." That's how attractive Christ is.

The point I want you to understand is this. When you came to salvation, to one degree or another you were drawn by the wonder and the attractiveness of Jesus Christ. Have you lost that? Certainly you don't think you already know everything about Him there is to know. Certainly you don't believe that pursuing the deep knowledge of Jesus Christ isn't going to yield you uncountable riches, because it is. We're so fickle. When we fall in love with somebody, our whole emotional system goes bonkers, goes wild, we're out of control. Our feelings run crazy. It's in that euphoria that we get married and a few years later there can grow so easily a major indifference. And that attraction to the precious character of that person to which we were drawn fades and we begin to lose any concern for a deeper more intimate and richer relationship. That fickle part of our fallenness passes, of course, into our spiritual life as well. And like the church at Ephesus, we leave our first love.

But Paul says, would you remember back with me how it all started? It all started for us because Jesus was so attractive. He had come with the righteousness beyond our own. He had come with the power beyond our own. He had come with the patience and endurance beyond our own. He had come with the glory we could never have. And He was so beautiful and so gracious and so loving and so merciful and so kind and so winsome and so forgiving that He was attractive beyond anything we ever saw. And we were drawn to Him. And it never really was a question...well, am I willing to follow Him? Or, am I willing to submit to His sovereignty in my life? Or am I willing to let Him be Lord of my life? That was never an issue. The issue that consumed us was how soon can I know this Christ...how soon can I build an intimate relationship with one so gracious and so loving, so powerful? And that's how we came.

Paul says, "Look, all that stuff I trashed for the sake of Christ." Then in verse 8, "More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." He says there isn't anything in life that competes with Christ...nothing. That's what he's saying. I don't care what it is. There is nothing that is so attractive to me. There is nothing to gain my attention like Christ. There is nothing that can capture my allegiance like Christ. There is nothing that can pull my love like Christ. There is nothing to which I have such devotion as Christ. There is nothing which I worship as I worship Him. There is no one I desire to know as much as I desire to know Him. I came in this way and I still feel this way, Paul says, I am still absolutely astounded and amazed at the surpassing value of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord. The treasure, the pearl, all surpassing in its greatness and its worth.

And he's not just talking about knowing Jesus in a saving sense, but knowing Him in the sanctifying sense as well. This became his life because there in verse 9 he says, "That I may know Him." In verse 8 he indicates that I do know Him but in verse 10 he says, "But I want to know Him." In other words, the knowing is a growing...it's a knowing in the sense of a deepening intimate union with

Christ. Paul gave up all the stuff for a relationship. He gave up all the religious activity for a relationship.

What an incredible thing it is that we can know Jesus Christ face to face and intimately. What an incredible thing it is that Christ doesn't live back in the centuries or somewhere amid the clouds of heaven unknown to us. Incredible it is that he is near us, that He is with us, that He is in us and that we can know Him.

And so, he says the exchange was easy. I count all things, everything in life nothing in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Then he says, here's his testimony, "For whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ." To have Christ, I'll sell all. To buy the pearl, I'll sell all. To buy the treasure, I'll sell all. I'll give everything I have in exchange for my soul if my soul can be linked to Christ. That's what he's saying.

And that's how it is when you come to Christ. You enter in to a relationship. Sometimes you hear people say that we need to receive Jesus as our personal Savior, right? And that's right. That is correct. That is what Paul means when he says that I may gain Christ. There's a personal intimacy there. He even uses the personal pronoun "my" back in verse 8 to speak of Christ Jesus, my Lord.

And what did he gain from the worthy one? What were the worthy things that came with the worthy one? Verse 9, "And may be found in Him not having a righteousness of my own derived from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith."

He says, what do I get? First of all, I get the righteousness of Christ. To know Him is to have His righteousness. It is to have His holiness, His virtue infused into me, imputed to me. It makes me right before God. It's a righteousness not that I have attained through the law but a righteousness granted to me through Jesus Christ, it comes by faith. The first thing I get in knowing Christ is His righteousness. That means a right standing with God...a gift from God to the sinner appropriated by faith in the perfect work of Christ which satisfies God's justice.

Listen, Paul is willing to lose the thin and fading robe of his reputation if he can gain the splendid and incorruptible robe of the righteousness of Christ. So he says I want to know Christ, I want Him intimately involved in my life and I in His because in that relationship is righteousness.

Secondly, power. Verse 10, why do I want to know Him? Because I want to know Him for the power of His resurrection. I have been religious but I have been impotent. I have been religious but I have been sinful. I want righteousness and I want power and they come through Christ. I want to know Him continually. I want to pursue Him continually and the deep knowledge of Him in order that I may experience His power. As Daniel 11:32 says, "The people who know their God will display strength

and take action." I want that same power that raised Jesus from the dead operating in my life.

There's a third desire that Paul had in having Christ and that was that he might have the fellowship of Christ in suffering. We might even call it the endurance and the patience of Christ. I want to know Him. I want to know the power of His resurrection. And I want to know the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death. He said I want to be fully immersed in one who knows how to suffer triumphantly. That's his point. Because life is suffering and life is weakness. And life is sin. I want overcoming life therefore I want righteousness. I want power. And I want to be able to deal with suffering triumphantly. So I want to fellowship with Him in His sufferings. I want to die like He died. I want to be so fully immersed in Christ that in the midst of my personal suffering His strength becomes my strength. I want to be like Him. I want to be one who can lay down my life. That's why I want to know Him. And what a wonderful, wonderful thing to know Him that way.

And then lastly, I want to know Him not only for His righteousness and His power and His triumph in suffering, but I want to know Him for His glory, verse 11. "I want to know Him in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead." I want to know Him for the sake of heaven. That's what he's saying. I want to know Him so I can be a part of literally in the Greek "the out resurrection from among the corpses." I want to be raptured. I want to be in glory. I want to be in heaven.

So here Paul says, "Look, I saw the pearl and I saw the treasure and immediately I understood by God's grace on my heart and mind that this was more valuable than anything I had and I wanted to know Him. I wanted to know Him so much I gave up everything. I wanted to know Him so much that I counted everything I had accumulated in my entire religious life as trash and everything else in the world as trash. And all I wanted was Christ. And I wanted His righteousness, and I wanted His power and I wanted His triumphant spirit, and I want His glory."

And that's how it all starts. Look at your own Christian life. Is it still that way? Or are you indifferent to the relationship? I ask you the question I asked at the very beginning...what is the current condition of your personal relationship with Jesus Christ? Is it a growing knowing? Is it a deeper relationship than it's been in the past? Is it sweet communion? Are you more concerned to get in touch with yourself than you are with Him? Are you more preoccupied with the worthless trash of the world than you are with the infinite treasure at your disposal in Him? It's the question. That's at the heart of all Christian living.

Father, we thank You this morning that You have given us in Your Word this reminder, that our Christian life is all about knowing Christ. We came that way because we saw Him and Your Holy Spirit quickened our hearts at His attractiveness. And we saw Him more precious than anything and so we were willing to make the exchange for our souls. We looked at our lives and the best that we had, our religion, our sincerity, our achievements and we said, "But He's not impressed." And neither am I when we saw Christ. We came at the very beginning because we wanted to know Christ. Lord,

we should want to know Him now more than ever, more than ever. Drive us to that deep knowledge of Christ that will preserve us from the sinful tragic iniquities that blight Your church. Christianity today shouldn't be so described as we read, it should be described as people in a growing vital intimate communion with the living Christ who are therefore becoming more and more like Him, expressing His righteousness, His power, His triumph in suffering and headed for glory. Make us those kinds of people. Amen.

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