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Upper Thames Missionary Church
Pentecost Sunday 2021

"Say it Again" - NOTES
Philippians 3:1-14

To help you understand this passage today, we need to mention a few important themes first:

First: Legalism

We're looking at a Warning about legalism

- Paul has seen Christians Compromising their new freedom and identity in Jesus in order to please strong personalities around them – watch out for these kind of controlling people! Says Paul

Second: The Basics

In contrast to the heaps of rules legalism wants to impose on new Christians from different ethnicities and backgrounds, Paul highlights two “basics” in this passage:

1. In V. 3 – we see it's the Holy Spirit / Jesus that we must rely on
 - a. Paul is pleading with them NOT to rely on the flesh
 - i. Flesh does not mean sinful nature here, though in other parts of the scripture that's what it mean, here it would be better to understand “flesh as "the pride of physical descent," including signs, status, abilities, commitments (vv.4-6)
2. Another basic is that being a Christian isn't just about saying the right thing – or saying you have faith in Jesus – Faith is an action – **focusing on Jesus - means living like Jesus** - form and pattern (11) not just thinking about him from time to time.

Finally, my brothers,[a](#) rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.

-Finally - not the end of the letter, but “*we've come to the point of what I've been saying so far*”

-he then continues on as if to say, so now that we've reached the present moment, I want to take some time to remind you of these things --- (even if they aren't happening around you at the time

On a side note:

-This is why rhythms are important: we need reminders (often daily) and our habits form and prepare us when *we aren't in the middle of a crisis*, so we know what to do when something does happen

-we need to know the scriptures so that when someone says something that doesn't line up with the grand arc of scripture we can tell

2 Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh.

-Here is Paul's first area of concern: circumcision - and the group of people who are obsessed with "making Jews" of the gentile Christians.

-he has harsh words for them – dogs was a term they used to describe gentiles, so he uses it back at them, evil doers here doesn't quite capture the irony Paul is employing here – he's calling them literally “bad works people” because they thought of themselves as doing “good works” by getting the gentiles to take on Jewish law.

-yes there are commands to be circumcised in scripture, Paul knows that better than anyone else, but Paul is taking that opportunity to warn them about a common problem - **people (Jews in this case who have become Christians) can get so fixated on a verse or a small part of scripture that they can lose sight of the whole thing - they can't see of the forest for the trees!**

3 For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God[b] and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—

Think about it like this:

-its not about what you HAVE (a physical marker of identity)

We can expand that out in our day to:

-a social standing in society

-a bible college degree

-what actually matters is what you Give away:

The word here for "Worship" literally means service - Paul is saying - the real people of God are the ones who live their whole lives as service to HIM (not just sing songs to him on a Sunday morning- (that's **part** of it, expressing our love and devotion in music... but that's not the big picture of a life of worship that Paul is talking about here) This is about the devotion of God's people which is revealed in their attitudes, behaviours and character every day.

4 though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more:

-Paul's Earthly boast

-If flesh counted, Paul says “I had it all” – things I believed really matter to God and really mattered in this earthly life

5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law,[c] blameless.

- Paul hits on all the major “fleshly” markers of being a person of God
- Flesh does **not** mean “sinful nature” here.
- None of these things are “sinful nature,” but all of them had become "pride of descent" - my parents are so and so, my ancestors are so and so, I have the special mark -

- Paul is living proof that the law is not enough

7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed, I count everything as **loss** because of the surpassing **worth** of **knowing Christ Jesus** my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the **loss of all things** and count them as rubbish, in order that I may **gain Christ** 9 and be found in him,

-redefining the Good life

-everything that seemed to be gain, compared to this new treasure I have found, is junk!

-this is the parable of the treasure in the field all over again

"The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure in a field a man found and hid. IN his joy we went and sold all he had just to go and buy that field."

not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law,

Paul wasn't talking about buying anything here, but about being in good standing with God, like (most) of us want to be in good standing with the bank.

-Paul says he used to think that pride of decent, the honour of belonging to the family of Israel was the greatest thing, but he saw the light - literally, on the road, and realized it wasn't his family markers and name, but the Grace of Jesus that put him in good standing with God.

but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

-It is not your past, your family name, your past actions - good or bad- that determine your good standing with God or not. It is Faith - Jesus' faithful love to you, and your loving response back to him. - God gladly gives you a new family name, he gladly erases your past mistakes, he gladly welcomes you into his Kingdom through faith - nothing else.

-The scriptures here are pointing us in one direction with everything we read today - toward Jesus.

10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

-Our life of faith can be bookended like this - we first encounter Jesus, but until we trust him, or pledge our allegiance to the King, we don't truly "KNOW" him. That is a personal relationship, not just a knowledge of a fact. The other end of the bookend is Resurrection - we can be confident that everything in our life will work out for good, even though we'll have to pass through death before we can be raised back up to new and perfect life with no more tears and no more pain.

12 Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my

own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, **14** I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

-already made "perfect" doesn't refer to "perfectionism" or being the best God can make you - its about completing, finishing, or reaching the end of the race - Paul is saying he Hasn't got to the end of the race, instead, his is still in the thick of it. He is navigating the turns and obstacles that arise in life.

-You and I are in the same situation Paul was when he wrote this. We haven't reached the end yet either. We are still pressing on toward the Goal - the upward call of God - which as Paul has just said, is the resurrection life that none of us have yet.

Each one of us is going to rely on **something** in this race to get us through to the end.

-there are two basic choices

1. We can believe that the "Flesh" is what we have to rely on this week.
 - I. Your wealth, your time management, your skills, your honour, your reputation, your name.... That's all the stuff Paul used to rely on... stuff he put on the credit side of his balance sheet.... then he realized all that is trash compared to one thing:
 - II. Jesus – HE is the second choice (and the one you want to make!)
2. As it said in verse 3 - "we worship by the Spirit of God"
 - I. That means we live, serve, think, and act all in the power of the Holy Spirit – our status with God isn't gained by our good works and circumstances – all that is a hinderance –

God wants you to choose the second! He wants to pour his Spirit out on you – That means he wants to be with you, to empower you, to bind you to himself and to his Church.

Through Jesus the King, we are people of Grace, and our sign is the Holy Spirit in us.

Relying on the flesh ends in death, but relying on the Spirit means that you will be able to Press on in his power, endure suffering, and even **pass through** death with His strength, and in the end, whether you had your fair share of suffering or joy in this life, you can be sure of the hope of the resurrection, no tears, no pain, and perfect healing will come.

So hear today the reminders of Paul from the scriptures:

1. Don't rely on yourselves
2. Don't fall into legalism
3. Don't try to please people
4. Rely on the Spirit
5. Worship and serve in His freedom
6. Keep your eyes fixed on the prize that is beyond these "light and momentary stuggles"