I Want to Know Christ

Philippians 3:1-21

Key Verse: 3;10 “I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his suffering, becoming like him in his death,”

Last month my family had a family trip to Korea. When we left, we carried several bags, which mostly contained gifts for my family members in Korea. Other than these gift bags, we carried our own suitcases for basic needs. In fact, those who travel to other countries don’t need houses, land, jobs and anything belonging to this land. We carry only a suitcase. What I’m trying to say is that when we go to heaven, we don’t need anything from this earth, not even a suitcase. There is no one who lives on this earth forever, whether we live rich or poor. We all die without exception. But we, people of God, have a place to go, which is heaven, where Jesus is. This is because our citizenship is in heaven. Only those who have the heavenly passport can enter the kingdom of heaven. Some of us are born American citizens. But I had to pay a certain amount of money and wait for a while to gain American citizenship. But we received this heavenly citizenship through only faith in Jesus Christ, who paid the price of our citizenship through his death on the cross! Praise Jesus!

In chapter 3 Paul warns against those who have confidence in their human condition, and he reveals his spiritual goal. Finally, he asks us to follow his good example as the apostle of Christ Jesus.

First, rejoice in the Lord (1-3). Look at verse 1. “***Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.***” No matter how many good words we may say, there is no one who likes to hear the same message again and again. But Paul said that he had no trouble repeating the same message to the Philippians. What is his message? It is “Rejoice in the Lord!” Indeed, he repeated it 16 times in his letter. In 4:4 he said, “*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice*!” There are many reasons why Paul repeated this message. We can rejoice always because we are in the Lord, we are in Jesus. We have the glorious hope in the Lord Jesus. As the resurrection followed the crucifixion, so the glorious hope follows our present sufferings. This is why Paul said in Romans 8:18, “*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us*.” Amen! While Paul was writing this letter to the Philippians, he was in jail. In jail most prisoners are not happy. But Paul was joyful in jail and encouraged others to rejoice because he was in the Lord Jesus. He believed in the glorious resurrection and eternal life with the Lord Jesus in heaven. We have many reasons to become sorrowful and grumpy on this earth. But we have more reasons to become joyful and happy because of hope in heaven. Amen!

Look at verses 2-3. “***Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh-***-” In these verses Paul used harsh words such as dogs, evildoers, and mutilators. Who are they? They are Judaizers who insisted the Gentile believers follow the Jewish tradition to become Christians. At that time according to Moses’ Law, all the Jews were circumcised on the eighth day after they were born. Judaizers claimed circumcision from the gentile believers to become descendants of Abraham. But the gentile believers did not need to be circumcised because circumcision is the circumcision of the heart by the Holy Spirit, not of the flesh by the hand of men. (Ro 2:28,29) We become people of God through faith in Jesus, not by the fulfillment of any human requirements. In verse 9 Paul adds, “***not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.***”

Second, the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus (4-9) Paul had many reasons to boast his human condition and many things to brag about what he had, but what was his attitude toward all of these? Now look at verses 4-6. “...***though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless***.” According to these verses, Paul had a perfect spec as a pure Jew. He was born by Jewish parents who had the prestigious root of Benjamin, the descendant of Jacob and Saul, the first king of Israel. Paul was a very devoted Pharisee who had studied under the great rabbi Gamaliel. He was also a Roman citizen who enjoyed all kinds of privileges and benefits as a Roman citizen. In American terms Paul was like one of the Kennedys or Bushes. So, there were not many who boasted their human condition before Paul.

But what was Paul’s response to all these human benefits and privileges? He said that he considered all these as loss or garbage for Jesus. Look at verse 7. “***But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.***” What were gains to Paul are all those benefits and achievements as a pure Jew. But he considered all of these as losses or useless garbage. Why? It is for the sake of Christ Jesus. He chose Christ Jesus rather than all his earthly benefits and glory. He continues in verses 8-9. “***What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith***.” Paul chose Christ Jesus because he knew the value of knowing Jesus Christ. Knowing Jesus Christ is different from knowing about Jesus Christ. Knowing Jesus accompanies participation in his suffering and glory, not just getting information about him. Paul put knowing Jesus Christ as his priority. He considered knowing Christ Jesus as the treasure with value surpassing anything else on this earth. So, he was willing to give up all things he had to have Jesus. In the Parable of the Hidden Treasure in Matthew 13:44 Jesus said, “*The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field*.” Like this lucky farmer Paul found Jesus, who is a treasure hidden in a field, and sold all he had and bought Jesus.

Paul was a wise heavenly investor. There was another spiritual hero in the Old Testament. His name is Moses. Hebrews 11: 24-26 says about Moses. “*By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.*” Moses chose to know Christ Jesus and participate in his suffering with his people more than enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin in Pharaoh’s palace. Moses knew what was the most important and valuable thing in his life. Like Moses and Paul, we must be wise heavenly investors in this world. Since we came to know Jesus Christ, we gave up everything and followed him. Then we must follow him to the end until we come to know him more and deeper. We must not drop out on the way, or sell Jesus for the sake of fleeting pleasures of sin.

We are spiritual investors who put everything in heaven. Jesus said in Matthew 6:19-21. “*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your hearts will be also*.” Paul knew the value of Jesus Christ and invested his whole life in him. This is not all. He desired more.

Third, I want to know Christ. (10-14) As we know, Paul lived a Christ-centered life more than anyone else in the Bible. He knew Jesus Christ more than anyone else. He was a friend of Peter, the top apostle of Jesus. He listened to Stephen's testimony about Jesus. Above all, he met Jesus Christ personally on the way to Damascus. Still, he desired to know Jesus more. Look at verses 10-11. “***I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his suffering, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead***.” Paul heard the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. But to him, Jesus’ death on the cross and resurrection was still a mystery. How could the Holy God appear as a man and die on the cross? Who is Jesus that he obeyed the Father and reappeared as the glorious light to Paul? Paul wanted to know more and deeper about the meaning of Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection. He wanted to participate in his sufferings so that he could experience the power of resurrection.

 We have many ways to know Christ Jesus. Through Bible study or personal prayer or fishing we come to know Christ Jesus. Above all we come to know Christ through our sufferings. When we suffer and participate in his sufferings, we gain Christ and are found in him. I had a chance to talk with one missionary in Brazil yesterday who has a life key verse from Philippians 3:10, and he explained why. A few years ago, suddenly his wife passed away from a stroke leaving her husband and three young children behind. This missionary was shocked and extremely sorrowful. He said that he experienced excruciating pain and sorrow by the sudden death of his wife. But he did not remain in sorrow and pain. He remembered Jesus who had experienced tremendous pain and sorrow on the cross. He found himself in the cross of Jesus and he received comfort from him. Since then, his relationship with Jesus became deeper and deeper. A few years later, he remarried by God’s grace, and experienced the power of resurrection. In the same way, when you suffer, remember Jesus Christ and find yourself in him. Then you will know the meaning of your suffering.

During his missionary journeys Paul suffered much for the sake of Christ Jesus. He testified this in his second letter to the Corinthians (2 Co 11:16-33) However, he did not think that he knew all about Christ Jesus or that he achieved his goal. What did he say? Look at verses 12-14. “***Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead. I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus***.” Paul was not complacent. He forgot all that he had done for Christ thus far and how he suffered for the gospel, and he thought about what is ahead before him and struggled to win the prize which is in heaven for him. The prize in heaven is the crown of life which is given from our Lord Jesus Christ (Rev 2:10). Paul was like a marathoner. He ran and ran until he crossed the finish line. No one dares say that they have already arrived at their goal in knowing Jesus and learning from him. As the universe is unfathomable and unlimited, so too is the capacity for learning Jesus. We have one thing we should do as Paul did, which is forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead. As Hebrews says, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.” until we receive the crown of life from our Lord Jesus Christ. (He 12:2) Amen!

Fourth, follow my example (15-21) We have many things to learn from Paul such as his humility, compassion, persistence, loyalty to Jesus, zeal for the gospel, and so on. In these verses what does Paul want us to learn from him? It is his viewpoint to see the heavenly things. He has spiritual eyes to see the treasure in heaven. He has eyes to see the true value of Jesus. Look at verses 15-17. “***All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained. Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do***.” There were many opponents who stood against Paul. There were many enemies of Christ who persecuted the church as he had done before. Paul described them as the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, their glory is their shame, and their mindset is only on earthly things. (18-19) But Paul did not see them all as his real enemies. His real enemies are those who deny the cross of Jesus and the power of his resurrection. He focused on the heavenly things. He looked up to heaven and longed for the prize which he would receive from the Lord Jesus.

Look at verses 18-19. “***For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things***.” The enemies of the cross of Christ are those who follow their fleshly desire and put their hope on the things of this world. Paul warned them saying that their final destination is hell, they seek only their physical pleasure, they boast their shameful things, and they put their thoughts and minds only on things of the world. John the Apostle said these in 1 John 2:16, “*the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*,” According to Paul, if we seek only our physical desire and easy-going life, we become the enemies of the cross of Christ. In other words, if we don’t live a life worthy of Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross, we become friends of Satan.

Look at verses 20-21. “***But 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***.” Paul was born a Roman citizen. But he considered all his human benefits and privileges as loss or garbage for the sake of Jesus. He saw God’s glory through his spiritual eyes. He saw his glorious resurrection and transformation with his spiritual eyes. What we see and how to see is important for our future. Through this upcoming ISBC 2023, we want to see ‘His Glory’ through spiritual revival. Let us pray for God’s glory and let us know Christ and learn of him more and deeper through this conference. Amen!