

“Resurrecting Righteousness” | Philippians 3:1-11

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(Small Group Discussion Questions on Page 7)

Introduction (Do you know who I am?)

“Do you know who I am?” Have you ever heard someone say that? In this age of 24-7 internet live-streaming, celebrities are caught saying it all the time. When they are made to feel **low**, **disrespected**, not seen as special or privileged, they inevitably indignantly ask ‘Do you know who I am? Do you know who I am?’

In recent years, famous stars like **Alec Baldwin**, **Reese Witherspoon**, **David Hasselhoff**, the character **Ron Burgundy** from the movie *Anchorman*, and even **Mike Tyson** have defended their honor against detractors of the arts and entertainment aristocracy by saying “Do you know who I am?”

- By the way, if Mike Tyson ever ask you that question, you never want to respond by saying ‘what’s that, I can’t hear you.’ Trust me. Just ask Evander Holyfield.

We roll our eyes at this kind of ‘do you know who I am’ righteousness. These people are arrogant, so full of themselves, foolish.

But while we might not be a Tyson or Baldwin or a Ron Burgundy. And we probably won’t say aloud: do you know who I am? As fallen creatures, as sinful human beings, we tend to default to this “do you know who I am” type of righteousness. At the very least, we have hearts that operates according principle, even if our lips never dare to utter the phrase.

We really believe that our own contributions are **good enough to give us right standing** in the eyes of God, ourselves, and everyone else. At the end of the day: it’s our achievements, diplomas, degrees, skills, prestigious occupations, positions of power. It’s these things that give us our deepest sense of ultimate worth and identity.

“I’m not just anybody; **I’m a somebody**. I matter.”

And if we don’t feel that way yet; chances are that we’ll work hard so that we someday will.

In our text today in Philippians 3, Paul describes two types of righteousness. The first is this the 'do you know who I am? Righteousness.' The righteous status that is based on myself and what I bring to the table (in verses 1-6).

The second is the 'do you know who I am *in Christ*?' righteousness. The righteous status from God that comes through faith in **Christ's achievements** as the foundation of our lives, our salvation, and our future (in verses 7-11).

We'll start with the 'do you know who I am? righteousness described in Phil. 3:1-6 located on page 981 in your pew Bibles.

I. The 'Do you Know who I am?' Righteousness (Phil. 3:1-6)

After a brief, rather cordial introduction, Paul quickly ramps up the argumentative jets.

In verse 3, Paul says "Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh."

- Dogs, evildoers, mutilate the flesh (v. 3)
 - **Dogs** = term usually employed by Jews against pagans, now turned against Jewish Christians
 - **Evil Doers/evil workers** is leveled against those who were doing good work of adhering to the law, also normally applied to non-Jews
 - "**Mutilate the flesh**" and v. 3 "**we are the circumcision**" is a polemic against the outward ritual sign of Judaism

Next, Paul focuses in on where we derive our confidence. This is where he contrasts the two kinds of righteousness: confidence based on ourselves versus confidence based on Christ.

- In verses 3-4, Paul contrasts Christ and "the flesh" three times
 - v. 3b "we glory/boast in Christ Jesus and do not put confidence **in the flesh**"
 - v. 4a "though I myself have reason for confidence **in the flesh** also"
 - v. 4b "If anyone else thinks he has confidence **in the flesh**, I have more."

The word **flesh** can have many meanings in the New Testament. It can refer to:

- the human body; i.e. 'flesh and bones'
- our sinful nature; Gal. 5 works of 'the flesh' v. works of 'the Spirit'
- one's ancestry and heritage, like in in Rom 8:3 when Paul calls his fellows Jews "my kinsmen according to the flesh."

Here in Philippians 3, "the flesh" refers primarily to Paul's privileged position as an obedient Jew. This becomes very clear when we look at Paul's list of credentials in verses 5-6.

- Paul's Hebrew Credentials (vv. 5-6)
 - Circumcised on the eighth day
 - of the people of Israel

- of the tribe of Benjamin [Benjamin was prestigious among the Jewish tribes. It was well-known for remaining loyal to David when the monarchy broke up in 1 Kings 12:21.

Paul continues:

- a Hebrew of Hebrews
- according to the Law, a Pharisee [The word Pharisee is used 39 times in NT, but only once [here] in the letters]
- according to zeal, a persecutor of the church,
- according to righteousness under the Law, blameless.

How does this all of this relate to us? Paul's principle of confidence in the flesh extends to any defining characteristics that mark us out as special and contribute to our sense of ultimate worth and identity. **Confidence in the flesh is boasting in ourselves**, as if we can establish right standing before God, the world, and ourselves based on something we bring to the table.

[Transition to Illustration]

You may say, 'oh yes, that was me many years ago. Thank goodness I got over that.' But have you? Paul, after all, is writing this letter to *Christians*, not to unbelievers.

It's worth asking, then, if there might be some aspect of your life that you are tempted to latch onto in an effort to establish your own right standing in the eyes of the world and maybe even God?

Illustration [Snarky Dude Gets the Full Weight of Boston]

In college, before I was a Christian, my righteousness was musical proficiency. I spent hours and hours a day devoted to developing top proficiency on my instrument at a music college in Boston. I didn't feel entitled; I felt elite; and I earned it.

I had this enormous amplifier, a Mesa Boogie Dual Rectifier. This amp that was twice as tall as me and loud enough to blast this entire congregation from 6567 Arlington Blvd to the Barnes and Noble at Seven Corners in just one loud, earthshaking strum.

I recall at one gig, a rather condescending older man saying to me with a snarky smirk, 'Wow. A Dual Rectifier you think you can handle that amp, kid?' At that moment, I remember **the spirit of my father**, my **mother**, my **mother's father**, my mothers' father's great grandfather and **the furious rage of a thousand Bostonians** rushed out of me with perfect arrogance, 'Do I think I can handle it? I don't know can I handle it?' Then I started wailing on the guitar. 'I think I'm gonna be ok.'

I used to do stuff like that all the time, and every time it felt strong—powerful; in the moment. 'You don't get the best of me. Not after how hard I've worked.' But it always left me feeling empty in the immediate aftermath. And increasingly so.

Years later, I became a Christian. Learned the Scriptures. Translated these very verses in Philippians from the original greek. Surely, by then I had gotten over the 'do you know who I am righteousness.' Sadly, no. I had just **shifted the emphasis to other boasts**: academia,

professorships, publications. Same poison; different product. I could just as easily shift it to pastoral ministry now.

As is the case for most (and probably all) of us, I need Paul's admonition *daily*. In my experience, the sinful jump from **skill** to **self-righteousness** is nearly automatic in fallen human beings—even Christians. If we don't actively guard against it; it's almost inevitable.

That's the first kind of righteousness. The 'do you know who I am? righteousness'. The one that answers opposition by saying "if you have reason for confidence in the flesh; I have more."

In verses 7-11, Paul shifts gears to another kind of righteousness: the 'do you know who I am *in Christ*?' righteousness. The righteousness that leads

- not to **the vicious circle of endless religion**,
- not to **ourselves**,
- + **but to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ** and
- + to the certain hope of resurrection.

II. The 'Do you Know who I am *in Christ*?' Righteousness (Phil. 3:7-11)

- Loss (3x in verses 7-8)

- ⁷ But whatever gain I had, these things I **counted as a loss** on account of Christ.
- ⁸ Indeed, I **count all things as loss . . . I have suffered the loss of all things**
- "and I count them all as **rubbish**"
 - **Cf. KJV** "count it all as dung"
 - Gk. *skubalon*; lumps of manure, rotting food and even rotting corpses.
 - "Loss" *zemeia* (3x) and "rubbish" *skubala* has an alliterated effect.
 - *Zemeia, zemeia, zemeia; skubala*
 - Loss, loss, loss, rubbish!

+ Gain/Found

- because of the surpassing greatness of **knowing** Christ Jesus [a personal relationship and resurrection life; not just more endless religion]
- in order that I might **gain** Christ
- ⁹ and that I might **be found** in him
- The summary sense is: "**I lose all things but am found in him.**"

Illustration [Retrieving the Rubbish Righteousness]

This language of loss is the same **language used of a shipwreck** in which cargo was lost in **Acts 27**. The technical term for this is **jettisoning**. It is a practice that is still used to this day. When a crew encounters treacherous storms, deadly rocks, or even modern-day pirates, the crew can be forced to throw the cargo overboard in an effort stabilize the ship.

Paul uses the idea here to suggest that **we toss our self-righteousness overboard** so that we can grab hold of the true righteous status from God and depends on faith.

Yet: if we look at our lives, it's probably the case that we're happy to toss over our shame, our guilt, and our sin. Let the stormy waters swallow those wretched things forever!

But I'm willing to be that most of us are tempted to only partially toss over our pride. That one last thing—our pride—we figure we can toss it over in a fishing net.

- Drag it along behind us as the storm abates and the ship stabilizes.
- Keep it on retainer so that we can pull it back up whenever we might need some retro-active self-righteousness.
- We tell ourselves we counted it as loss; but really, we've just kept it tow. Tethered to the arc. Hidden, underneath the surface of the water.

But how do we know? How can we tell if we're starting to pull the net back up again? We can tell by seeing how we respond when we are insulted, challenged, made to feel low.

Ask yourself: in those circumstances: do I respond like Christ who, as Philippians 2 says, 'though he was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but made himself nothing, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross?' Or, do we attempt retrieve the 'rubbish righteousness' that we previously counted as loss?

[Transition]

I think the reality is: **we'll always be fighting against the lure of self-righteous justification.** Even if we cut the cord; it finds itself getting stuck to the rudder. Always threatening to resurface.

We can know we've reverted to self-righteousness when our **skills** start to function as **objects for boasting** rather than as **instruments for blessing**.

You see: it's not actually our *skills* that we toss overboard; it's the tendency to jump from our **skills** to **self-righteousness**. What we toss over is the boast; not the skills rightly ordered for blessing under the righteousness of Christ.

Conclusion (Resurrecting Righteousness)

Recently, I saw this very clearly in my own life. It was a weekday night, around 7:30. I was working on getting Power-point slides perfected for an upcoming *Basic Christianity* class.

My seven-year old daughter came to me in the midst of this with much excitement:

'Daddy, can you give me a singing lesson?'

I sighed, could there be a worse time. 'A singing lesson, hunny, Dad is super busy right now, and it's almost bed time, let's do it another time, let's do the lesson tomorrow.'

I could almost see the net coming back up over the hull. I could feel it in my hands. In my head here comes the justification: 'This is important work I'm doing. I can't be playing around right now. Come on.'

Her long face jolted me. And somehow in that moment, grace broke through. I felt the net of self-righteousness starting to slip away.

'Let's sing!' I shouted.

'Yes daddy, ok, I'll pull up Spotify . . .'

'Ok, so what do you want to sing' I said.

She responded 'Taylor Swift.'

"O God please no. For I do not deserve the torture of this sonic purgatory. Take this burden from me, dear Lord." And, so, as quickly as I could I responded 'How about My Heart Will go On' by Celine Dion.

'Yes' she exclaimed! I love that song.'

And as she sang, time sort of stopped for me. I could hear myself instructing her, smiling, coaching her, but I was in a form of **spiritual suspended animation**.

It wasn't that the song was being sung perfectly. It was the *way* she was performing it. Her mannerisms, her total embodiment of the experience. She was lost in the moment. The feeling was so familiar to me. It was almost like watching myself when I first fell in love with music.

Before the career. Before the study. Before the self-righteousness. Before the boast had sucked the life out of the blessing.

I snapped out of it when she grabbed the ottoman and stood up on it to get to my height, and then instructed me to enact the scene from the *Titanic* movie when Jack and Rose are on the bow of the boat. "You're here, there's nothing I fear." This was absurd. This was beautiful. This is what happens when blessing drowns out boasting.

I felt my hands starting to let go of the net. In my peripheral vision, I felt a certain satisfaction as I watched pride and self-importance sink. Drowned in the ocean of God's grace. Hopefully forever. Probably not. But at least for tonight. *At least for now.*

Brothers and sisters, when we find ourselves longing to establish our standing on the glory we once had, the glory we now crave, or the glory we long for in the future. I pray that we will let go of the net. Let go of it right now. You've identified it. Some of you want to drag it out of the sanctuary, down through coffee hour, back into your car. Let go of it now. Don't leave until you watch it sink.

And as it sinks you will find safe passage in the ark of Christ's righteousness. And he will bring you home. Through his death, his resurrection, his perfect righteousness counted to you by grace alone through faith alone. A **resurrecting righteousness** that brings **gospel blessings** in the wake of **every jettisoned boast**.

Small Group Discussion Questions

(1) Identify some ways that you might be drawn to establish right standing before God, the world, and ourselves based on things that you bring to the table rather than everything that Christ brings on our behalf?

(2) What are some practical ways that you can let go of the fishing net of retroactive self-righteousness in moments when you feel belittled, brought low, or unjustly attacked?

(3) Paul largely focuses on his Jewish heritage and privilege as the objects of his former boast, the things he counted as lost for the sake of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord. Many of these things (e.g., Paul's Jewish tribe, his circumcision on the eighth day, the fact that his parents schooled him as a Pharisee with elite teachers) were not things Paul earned, but things he was born into. What privileges in your own life have you inherited that could, wrongly viewed, cause you to blockade Christ's intention to bless others through you by boasting in the things that were given to you by others, such as your lineage, family, or country?

(4) How does accurate confidence differ from self-righteous arrogance? How can we cultivate the one without falling into the other? What role might the theology of boasting versus blessing play in helping us to chart this course?

(5) How might we demonstrate the power of the resurrecting righteousness of Christ in our day to day lives? For example, how might our use of time communicate whether we derive our abiding hope and confidence from Christ or from ourselves, from the things Christ has done for us or the things we do for ourselves? How about in our language, our finances, our commitments, and the ways we view and treat others, especially non-Christians?