

Salvation Now Philippians 3:1-11

Scripture Introduction:

There is no doubt that moving is one of the most difficult experiences we undergo. The leaving of an old, familiar world for a new, unfamiliar one frankly is hard. I spoke yesterday with one of the families that recently departed Redeemer for unfamiliar territory in another state. It has been more than they bargained for—new home, new neighbors, new job and new customs. Trying to make sense of this new place God has taken them is hard, even though they know it is for God's good purposes in their life.

Our passage this morning is all about Paul helping us understand the new territory God has brought into by virtue of our salvation. Even though his “gracious moving of our lives” is for our benefit, it doesn't make it any less easy. Being a Christian is complicated. Often times it feels like we have left everything we knew for a place that is very unknown. What are we supposed to do? What does it all mean? Those questions and more are answered for us in our text this morning.

Introduction:

A few years ago I told the story of Larry. Larry had, what we may call, a very colorful background. He had a history of sexual liaisons with people of both genders. As a recovering drug addict, he attended 12-step recovery group almost daily. Recently he had celebrated his tenth anniversary of sobriety, and had become a substance abuse counselor. He had served in the marines but later became a doctrinaire pacifist.

Somewhere along the way, Larry became a Christian. He says he was converted by two hymns, *Just as I Am*, and *Amazing Grace*. As he heard the words of those hymns, it sunk in for the first time that God really did want him to come just as he was. God's grace was that amazing. In his own way, Larry has been trying to follow God ever since.

'In his own way,' says Larry. Larry admits he hasn't experienced the 'victorious Christian life.' He still overeats, chain-smokes, and sex continues to be a problem. And since he never manages to get up in time for church, he misses out on worship and Christian community. Once, Larry stated his dilemma this way, 'I'm stuck somewhere between *Just as I am* and *Just as God wants me to be*.' (“Why Be Good?”, Christianity Today, March 7, Glen Ellyn, IL: Christianity Today, Inc. 1994)

At least at some level, we can all identify with Larry. The Christian message of salvation has come to us as “good news,” as a message of saving grace. However, in the face of **difficult circumstances and trying temptations** the lure of old ways and other ways can be very appealing. Paul himself was familiar with difficult circumstances. At the time of this writing he was imprisoned in Rome and did not know if he would live or die. Nevertheless, he commanded the Philippians to rejoice in all circumstances. How in *this world* is Paul able to rejoice? Wasn't he aware of the suffering out there? What about in his own life?

Trying temptations are also not far from each one of us. A life given over to self—be it money, comfort, power, sex or food—can seem to make a whole lot more sense than the obedience of the Christian life. If we're honest, there's probably a whole lot more of “Larry” in us than we would like to admit or others to see.

Larry said that he was stuck somewhere between “just as I am and “just as God wants me to be. **Well, that also means that we have two more questions: Just where is now? And, just where is all of this going?**

It is that first question I want to wrestle with this morning: **Just where has this message of grace, this good news, this salvation brought us now?** In a couple of weeks, I want to look at the second question of where is all of this headed?

Proposition: **What does it mean to be saved now?** In this present hour, what does our salvation mean? To this first question, I cannot think of a better place to turn for answers than Philippians 3. **Here Paul powerfully joins his message to the testimony of his life to instruct us in the present implications of Jesus' saving work in our lives.**

1) Present discovery of the truth (1-3)

The context or background of our passage is not only Paul's trying circumstances in Rome, but also the defense of the message of salvation in Jesus Christ. Particularly in chapter three, **Paul is arguing against those who would distort the truth about the Gospel.** His opponents were what came to be called Judaizers because they taught that believing in Jesus Christ was not sufficient for salvation. It was also necessary to live by the Jewish code of conduct, especially fulfilling the Jewish rite of circumcision.

It was this challenge to the truth of Paul's message that leads him to boldly warn the Philippians and boldly reassert the truth of his message. Anything else is a distortion.

- **Bold warning (2):**

Three times Paul instructs us to "look out" for "dogs," "evildoers," and "those who mutilate the flesh," respectively. His warning is more aptly translated "beware." Harsher language could not be used to capture Paul's anger at his opponents. What do you mean, pastor, you say? Well, "dog" was a word that the Judaizers used to describe Gentiles who, in their minds, were unclean. Unlike today where dogs are our house pets, in that time dogs were the unclean animals of the world, like we think of rats today.

Furthermore, for Paul to call them evildoers was utterly contrary to their claim. They claimed to be perfectly righteous according to zealous obedience to God's law. This doesn't mean that they thought of themselves as sinless, but it does mean that they felt through their observance of all of the codes of conduct in the OT Law that they were perfectly righteous in the eyes of the Lord. Nevertheless, Paul calls them evildoers because they are rejecting Jesus Christ.

Finally, he calls them those who mutilate the flesh. The outward sign and pride of the Judaizers had been their circumcision. However, because this act doesn't compare to what Christ has accomplished and had led them to deny his sufficiency, Paul calls it a mutilation of the flesh.

- **Bold assertion (3):**

Paul warns us and all who would try to add to Jesus Christ as the source of salvation. **But next in verse 3 he boldly asserts to the Philippians that it is his message of salvation that is truth**—the real circumcision that leads people to true worship in the Spirit of God so that they can glory solely in Jesus Christ. According to Paul, salvation has nothing to do with what we can accomplish on our own, or according to our flesh. Rather, it is completely accomplished outside of us by the work of Jesus Christ.

Application:

What I want us to see first about this passage is that Paul is making a claim or an assertion about the truth of salvation that we presently have. We have the truth about salvation and it is very

simply the person and work of Jesus Christ. **Nothing else added to him and nothing less than him can bring us to the place of salvation.**

Paul is particularly addressing what we might call the **religious distortion** of the message of salvation, which is offered by those who teach that **Jesus is not enough**. Something must be added to make salvation a present reality in our lives.

But his words equally apply to those would claim that **something less** than Jesus will save. We might call this the **relativist distortion**, which teaches that there are other ways and other truths, which rival Jesus' salvation. **In other words, Jesus not just for some people in some places, but he is the truth of salvation for all peoples in all places and in all times.**

2) Present experience of freedom (4-9)

But let us dig deeper? What does it mean to have this truth in our lives now? What does it mean to be the "true circumcision?" What does it mean to be those who truly worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Jesus Christ? **In a word, Jesus means freedom! To be saved now means that this truth about salvation is coming to expression in a vibrant experience of liberation.** If we are not experiencing the freedom, then we do not yet know the salvation.

What does this mean?

- **Radical reassessment of our lives (4-9a)**

In order for us to presently experience the freedom of salvation offered in Christ, we must first make a radical reassessment of our lives. Just exactly where are we, really? This is what the apostle does in verses 4-6. To do this, Paul must reassess his former manner of life as a faithful and zealous Jew. What does he say?

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: 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 law¹ blameless.

According to Paul, if it were possible to have freedom and salvation according to God's law, what I earlier called the religious distortion, then he would have been the one who could have done it. He met all of the qualifications according to the flesh—circumcision, of Israel, of a faithful tribe, a faithful keep of the law, to point of persecuting those who didn't keep the law, blameless in every way.

- **Former manner of life (7)**

But according to Christ his former manner of life meant nothing. It was all a loss.

⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

Because Christ's appearing was such a clearer and better demonstration of righteousness that it had lead him to see that all of his strivings could never amount to anything remotely akin to what God's holiness demands. **Instead, he must declare spiritual bankruptcy.** After **reassessing** his life in light of Jesus Christ, he realizes he has no assets from his former religious way of life.

- **Present efforts (8)**

But Paul goes further. In verse 8 he says that even his present attempts at righteousness mean nothing. In fact, all things, all efforts, are rubbish. Or more precisely like the manure in a cow field. His attempts don't add up to anything. In fact, they work against him just like Isaiah said in Isaiah 46, "all our righteous acts are like filthy rags..."

In other words, he had no righteous assets in the past and he cannot presently procure for himself any righteous assets today. He is spiritually bankrupt.

- **Radical conversion**

What is left for us to do, in light of such a radical reassessment? **We must be radically converted to what Jesus Christ has done for us and without us.** Paul says in verse 9 that he has left everything that he may gain Christ. This is nothing less than a radical conversion to Jesus Christ. Theologically, we call this declaration of Christ's righteousness to us as our justification. Paul describes it this way in verse 9,

...in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

Make it clear!

But some of you may be asking me this question, "But Tom, you haven't told me how this is a present liberation or some great experience of freedom?"

This is freedom because through faith in Jesus Christ we receive what we could never accomplish through our efforts. By faith in Jesus Christ, we are now given his righteous standing with God. This is God's gift to us! As the one who suffered in our place he has removed our guilt and consequence of our sin. As the one who lived in our place, he has given us his perfect record or achievement of law-keeping. What Jesus has, we now have.

Application:

How wonderful is that? It means that I no longer have to live like the apostle Paul had lived most of his life—as one striving for righteous approval in the eyes of God. By virtue of faith in Jesus Christ, I can already live with that confidence. I don't have to wait to experience his approving eye. Because of Jesus I have it. I don't have to worry if I have lost his favor when I fail, because in Jesus I have one who never failed on my behalf. In other words, in Jesus Christ I can be forever free from the guilt and condemnation of sin.

But watch out for those who want to steal this freedom. Like in Paul's day, there are those in our day who want to steal this freedom from you. Of course, they would not come out and say it. But by an undo emphasis on certain codes of conduct and programs of behavior, they tend to minimize the freedom given in Jesus Christ and subtly teach that Jesus is not enough. What we really need to do is:

- ✓ Educate our kids in these certain ways
- ✓ Observe this certain diet
- ✓ Practice holidays in these certain ways
- ✓ Abstain from these certain behavior, foods or drinks that Jesus has not said in his word are forbidden.

I think you get the point. How easy is it for someone to rob us of our freedom that Christ has given to us?

3) Present participation in the power of Christ (10-11)

Present truth, present freedom, but that's not all. Some of you may be thinking like some who objected to Paul's message in his epistle to the Romans. If salvation means we have this righteous status, then why not sin and glory in our flesh? Paul's answer to that is the third aspect's of salvation's presence. We not only have the truth and a new freedom, we also have a present participation in the power of Christ.

More specifically, it is not just a participation in the power of Christ it is a participation in Jesus Christ himself. The real treasure of this passage is not simply knowing the truth or feeling liberated, it is knowing and gaining Jesus Christ. He says it over and over:

...for the sake of Christ. (7)
...the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. (8)
...in order that I may gain Christ⁹ and be found in him, (8-9)
...¹⁰ that I may know him (10)

Paul doesn't want to use Jesus he wants to know all there is to know about Jesus. And it that union or intimacy that propels growth in our lives in two important ways:

- **Inward growth (10)**

Knowing Jesus means that we participate in the power of his resurrection right now by living according to Kingly presence. No longer am I obedient to sin. Instead, by virtue of knowing Jesus I am more and more enabled to say yes to righteousness. Because I know Jesus I can obey Jesus. It is in this important way that participate in the resurrection now. Because he has been raised a new creation, I begin to partake of that newness now as I live according to my true humanity.

- **Outward suffering (10)**

It may seem strange, but this participation in Christ also means sharing in his power through sufferings—both internally as we suffer with internal temptation and externally as we deal with all manner of circumstances and situations which try our lives.

Through suffering, we follow the path of the cross of Christ that might also share in the glory of the resurrection (11)

Conclusion:

Today, people tend to divide what Paul clearly reminds us goes together: truth, freedom and power. Those things go together because they all flow forth from Christ. How dangerous it is when we try to act as though we have the real thing in the Christian life and make it seem like it is only one of them.

For example, those who claim to know the truth and have heads too big!

Or those who claim freedom and have hearts out of control!

Or those who claim obedience and our proud of their obedience!

No, the consequence of salvation now is only experienced as we are drinking deeply of the fountain that is Jesus Christ!