12 Philippians 3:10-11 Knowing Jesus: power and suffering

1. Introduction

Philippians 3:1-11 *Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. [2] Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. [3] For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh — [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 law, blameless. [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, 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— [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.*

a. In this personal passage Paul reveals what was going on in his heart when he met with |Jesus on the Damascus road (Acts 9)

Matthew 16:25-26 *For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. [26] For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?*

a. Jesus is speaking about an exchange – in order to gain life, you have to lose your life. To gain your soul it will cost you your life. Losing your life for his sake, you will find true life. If you hold on to the things that to you think are precious and not worth giving up, but reject the things that are precious to God, it will cost you your eternal soul. You will be better off if you make some exchange of how you live your life now for what God offers you in the life to come.

b. Salvation is also an exchange: you exchanged all you were for what Jesus is. Anything I may have had in life – achievements, merits, strengths, things men glory in, pride in what I can do – I lay at the feet of Jesus. If I gain the world if I lose this relationship with Jesus.

c. Jesus says, “I will save your eternal soul if you give up everything else you are putting your trust in.” Many are unwilling to pay that high price, but not Paul. We looked last time at how Paul changed the way he saw the things that he thought were good were the very things that were preventing him from truly knowing God. He consigned them to the rubbish pile.

d. In v8-11 Paul outlines five things that he gained, and they are the same things that you, too, gain when you are saved. These five are: knowledge, righteousness, power, fellowship and glory. They are things that we receive when we’re saved, yet they are also things that we grow in as we walk out our faith in a world that is increasingly hostile to us and to God.

2. To know Jesus

Philippians 3:8 *Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*

a. How does Paul describe the value of knowing Jesus? It is of surpassing worth – meaning it's of more value than anything else. He sets it above everything else. V8 begins with a series of words that are almost untranslatable – literally "but rather therefore at least even." He does so to add emphasis, these words are probably best translated "But way beyond that…"

b. In every way, when Paul talks about knowing Jesus, he's talking about knowing Jesus experientially – it's a knowledge that's based on friendship and intimacy, not on learned facts. The Greek word is ***gnosis***, and the OT Hebrew equivalent is ***yadah***, which expresses a bond of love between two people. It's the same word used in Genesis 4:1 "Adam *knew* Eve…" It's the level of knowing at a deep, personal, loving level that Paul means when he talks about the surpassing worth of knowing Christ.

c. Factual knowledge – head knowledge – is not the same thing as really knowing in the way that Paul desired to know Jesus.

3. Righteousness through faith

a. The second thing Paul gained was righteousness from God through faith. He had spent most of his life before meeting Jesus thinking he could gain righteousness through keeping the law. But you can never gain righteousness through things that you do. Paul's encounter with Jesus changed all that. Self-righteousness is a deception, and we must resist any temptation to gain God's favour by works of the flesh.

b. Only faith, expressed in personal trust and surrender, opens the door to receive the righteousness that comes from God. The yes of the soul to God, stripping away all pretence of righteousness through deeds of the flesh. The very best that we can do comes way short of the glory of God. Hebrews 11:6 "without faith it's impossible to please God." When Abraham heard the voice of God, he believed God and God reckoned it to him as righteousness. It's as simple as that, and it's still the basis of obtaining salvation today.

4. The power of his resurrection

Philippians 3:10 *…that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death…*

a. Paul goes on to give us two more gains that are contrasting in nature and very different in their outworking of gain in our walk with God. They are two areas of sanctification, not things we receive at salvation, things that we grow in as a process of experience and application through faith. The first thing that Paul wants to know is the power of Jesus' resurrection.

Romans 8:11 *If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.*

b. The Holy Spirit was the divine agency that raised Jesus from the dead – he was raised by the power of the Spirit. We have that same Holy Spirit living inside of us, and he is the source of our life, he is the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. He is now at work in us to change us so that we are

transformed into the image of Christ Jesus. This is the dynamic, life-giving spiritual energy that is now available to us through this intimate knowledge of Jesus.

Daniel 11:32 *…but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action.*

i Daniel says the same thing: those who have this intimate relationship with Jesus will have an internal power that enables them to stand firm and act wisely, taking a godly course of action.

c. What was accomplished when Jesus rose from the dead? It actually reversed an irreversible change! Clinical death is the total cessation of life – you stop breathing, the heart stops, eyes no longer respond to light, there is no muscular response. Within hours the body becomes stiff and cells begin to break down. All that's left after decomposition are the bones. What cannot be seen is the separation of the soul from the body. The soul leaves at death and cannot return, and all the changes to the physical body render it incapable of sustaining life.

d. To resurrect the dead back to life is to do the impossible, it is a mighty miracle of immense proportions! The power to reverse this irreversible change belongs to God alone. The resurrection of Jesus becomes a tremendous demonstration of the awesome power of God!

e. What was the greatest power of the resurrection? It was to overcome death – when God raised Jesus from the dead after three days it demonstrated that Jesus had overcome. The power of the resurrection is about overcoming; now that power to overcome is available to all of us who trust in Jesus. In conquering death, Jesus showed He had absolute power in both the physical and spiritual realms.

f. Paul experienced the power of Jesus' resurrection as he daily lived by faith in the Son of God. But too often we live in our own flesh by our own wisdom instead and thereby cut off our ability to live in the power of God. There is no power in the law – only the power to condemn us, not to overcome sin in my flesh. There's no power to serve God and no power for victory in my flesh. When Paul talks about power he uses the Greek word ***dunamis*** –that's the origin of our word dynamite. The power of the resurrection is spiritual dynamite.

Romans 1:4 *He…was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord…*

g. The disciples changed from a being a bunch of timid, fearful, despairing, unbelieving onlookers at the cross into a fighting force of fearless, joyful, witnesses for Jesus at Pentecost. It was the power of the resurrection as the Holy Spirit filled them and equipped them for the task ahead. Thomas couldn't be convinced by the other disciples that they had seen Jesus. He wanted physical proof, the marks of Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus appeared in person and allowed Thomas to put his finger in those marks, causing Thomas to fall at his feet in worship. He went on to be a fearless witness of the resurrected Jesus, taking the gospel to India.

1 Corinthians 15:17 *And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.*

h. Resurrection power brings us into the kingdom in the first place – if there were no resurrection we would still be dead in our trespasses and sins. We have already experienced the power of the resurrection in our salvation. When we came to Jesus, we died with him and we are raised to new life with him. We need this power for every day of our lives because without it we will become weak and defenceless. The power to conquer temptation, to overcome trials, to make us

strong when we are weak, to be a bold witness, to keep the fire burning and not give in to the spirit of the age.

5. The fellowship of suffering

a. We all want this power, but Paul was also very aware of another facet of knowing Jesus – sharing in his sufferings. We tend to focus on the promises that we like – "I'll never leave you or forsake you." "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you." "As the Father has loved me, so I love you." But there are promises that we're not quite so keen on and although we acknowledge that they are there in the bible, we tend to want to skip over them.

b. Paul is not saying that our sharing in Jesus' sufferings in any way contributes to his atoning work on the cross. That work is complete, and any suffering that we endure for his sake makes no difference to our salvation, although it may impact upon our rewards at the end of the age.

c. We prefer to have our lives not only peaceful, but without any pain or suffering if possible. But Jesus makes it clear that suffering for his sake is very much part of our lot if we are his disciples.

John 15:18-19 *If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. [19] If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.*

John 16:33 *I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.*

a. Many Bibles translate v10 as "the fellowship of his sufferings" – perhaps closer to what Paul intended. In Romans 8 Paul speaks of our future glory, he says God's purpose for us is to be conformed to the image of Christ. That is something that takes place over a long period of time. Our old nature is at war with the Spirit of God at work in us – we have to learn to put it to death.

b. We have the powerful force of a stubborn sin-nature to contend with. God uses suffering to burn off the dross, to confront us with our sinfulness and his holiness, and purify us. We have to cooperate with Him by humbling ourselves under His mighty hand through our trials, trusting His sovereignty over our suffering, casting all our cares on Him.

c. Fellowship means we share things in common in a context of closeness. We don't physically take part in Jesus' sufferings, they are now past history, so how do we have fellowship with his suffering? The writer of Hebrews points us towards the answer:

Hebrews 2:10 *For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation [Jesus] perfect through suffering.*

Hebrews 5:8 *Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.*

i The purpose of suffering is to bring about perfection – Jesus was made perfect through suffering. His ministry was marked by misunderstanding, opposition and betrayal, followed by physical and mental suffering of scourging with whips, and the brutality of crucifixion. We can never enter into his sufferings in the same way that he suffered on the cross. But there is a sense in which we can never be like him if we don't go through our own suffering. It's through that suffering that, like Jesus, we learn to entrust our soul to the faithfulness of the God of justice, knowing that at the right time we will be vindicated.

d. Jesus had never experienced the test of obedience until He suffered. His suffering was the ultimate test of His submission to the will of the Father. If we are to be like Him, we must also learn to obey God through suffering. What Paul is saying here is that in his experience, as he suffers for Christ, he also in some way suffers with Christ. There is a kind of sharing or bonding in this process that, for Paul, means that he comes to know Jesus more intimately. And that is why he is so keen to know Jesus more intimately through this fellowship of suffering.

e. Unlike Jesus, we have the powerful force of a stubborn sin-nature to contend with. God uses suffering to burn off the dross, to confront us with our sinfulness and his holiness, and purify us. But, we have to cooperate with Him by humbling ourselves under His mighty hand when we go through trials, trusting His sovereignty over our suffering, and casting all our cares on Him.

f. We know from his writings that Paul was no stranger to suffering – he gives us a brief catalogue of some of the things he has suffered because of Jesus:

2 Corinthians 11:24-28 *Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. [25] Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; [26] on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; [27] in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. [28] And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.*

g. It's unlikely we will have to go through some of the things that Paul did. Our journey may end up being very different. Paul is talking about the way that he has suffered on account of preaching the gospel. This is suffering directly because he is pursuing Jesus wholeheartedly. He was engaged in taking the gospel into hostile, enemy territory. Today's equivalent would be to preach the gospel in the streets of Moscow or Beijing or Tehran.

   i Although at present we enjoy considerable freedom to exercise our faith as the ekklesia of Jesus in this nation, there are signs that those freedoms will soon be under threat. Many of the things we take for granted right now will be denied us. We must heed the warnings of scripture and prepare our hearts so that we are not taken unawares.

h. Though Paul has suffered greatly for the sake of Jesus he still says his desire is to know Jesus in the fellowship of suffering. Experience has taught him that he has someone to fellowship with when he suffers, who has suffered far more than he has. It's good to read the accounts of those who have undergone intense suffering for Jesus to help us see how this fellowship works – read the stories of Corrie ten Boom, or The Heavenly Man, Brother Yun for example.

i. Paul's motivation is focused on the prize that lies ahead. He's in it for the long haul, playing the long game. We're seeking to win the war, but we may lose some battles on the way. Dunkirk was a setback, but D-day began the process that won the war.

6. I may attain the resurrection…

Philippians 3:11 *…that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*

a. Paul's vision is filled by the end-goal of resurrection – he doesn't want to miss it, this is the crowning glory he is living for. He remembers many times he's known the power of the resurrection – churches established, people saved, healed and restored, demons fleeing,

supernatural miracles. He's also suffered, finding strength in leaning on Jesus even in the face of betrayal, false accusation and death.

b. Through all of these things one thing has kept him going – the promise of resurrection. When he wrote this letter Paul didn't know if he was going to live or die. But he has been faithful, he hasn't quit, he's still going forward pursuing Jesus with everything he's got.

c. He sums up his thinking with a statement that is a little bit quirky in the Greek. Literally it says, "I want to attain the out-resurrection from among the corpses." This is looking forward to when he goes to be with the Lord when the dead in Christ rise to be changed in an instant (1 Corinthians 15, 1 Thessalonians 4). The day when he will receive his resurrection body and will finally be transformed into the image of Jesus. That's what he wanted.

d. The word Paul uses for resurrection is only used here in this verse – he takes the normal word for resurrection and puts "out" in front of it. What he is saying is quite straightforward. When Paul wrote this letter, the book of Revelation hadn't yet been written. In this verse Paul is making a distinction between two resurrections. Compare these verses from Revelation 20:

Revelation 20:4–6 *Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. [5] The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. <u>This is the first resurrection</u>. [6] Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.*

Revelation 20:12–13 *And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. [13] And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done.*

e. This is why Paul uses that unusual word "out-resurrection" – he is speaking of the resurrection from <u>among</u> the dead, described in Revelation 20 as the first resurrection. The second resurrection, at the end of the millennium is the resurrection <u>of the unrighteous dead</u>, who have not put their faith in Jesus for salvation. In the first resurrection only some rise, those who have died "in Christ." That's where Paul has his sights set, and it's where we must set our hope too.

7. Conclusion

a. These powerful verses of scripture underline the goal that Paul set for himself; let them be a provocation to us to pursue the same goals. Each week set this goal: to know Jesus and be like Him. You will see opportunities all over the place to apply it. There will be temptations where you need to rely on the power of His resurrection. There will be trials where you come to know the fellowship of His sufferings. There may be irritations where you must learn to be more conformed to His death. View it all as an opportunity to know Jesus and to remind you that it is all preparing you for that great day when He comes and you will be raised up in glory with Him for all eternity. That's our goal!