

We are back into our series on the book of Philippians this morning, entitled “All for Jesus,” and I hope that you’ve been seeing—as we’ve gone along here—that this title has resonated with Paul’s whole demeanor and framework in this letter.

Because Christ is truly the golden thread that runs through this letter. And just to give you a taste of this, which will also as a recap of where we’ve been, I’m going to list out for you some of the occasions—so far—that Paul has mentioned Christ. And this is only half of them.

And as we go through these, notice the prepositions that come before each mention of Jesus.

“Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus.”

“To all God’s holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi.”

“...he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

“God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.”

“And this is my prayer: that you love may abound... so that you may be... filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ...”

“...it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard that I am in chains for Christ.”

“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

“I know that I will remain... so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound...”

“Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ...”

“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus...”

“For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus...”

“I consider everything a loss... 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.”

“I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

What were some of the prepositions you heard? (In, of, through, for, is, with). The way that Paul speaks about Jesus reveals how much Jesus has taken over Paul’s life. Because everything is now in, of, through, for, and with Jesus. Everything *is* Jesus.

And Paul begins this next and last section in chapter 3—which we’ll read in a moment—saying that all who are mature should take this perspective. This forward-looking perspective, what we looked at last week, of striving for all that Christ Jesus has and is for us. The prize of life in Him. The goal of life in Him.

For Paul, there is no other life. And when we profess to be in Christ, our creed is the same. We who are ‘mature’—who know this faith, who believe by faith, who have received Christ and His Spirit—sing the same anthem.

So let’s live up to it, he says. **Read Philippians 3:15-21.**

This past week, I took a week-long course at Regent College—a graduate school of theology in Vancouver. I had signed up for the class as an online student, but I decided to go in for one day so that I could experience the class in person—which is always far superior than being on Zoom.

But this required that I find parking close to Regent. There's a big building going up right next to the college, so everyone has been required to find parking elsewhere in the UBC area. And so I parked in an underground parking lot, paid for my spot, and then went to class.

After the class had finished, I spent an hour or so mingling, doing some work in the library, and then I headed back to my car. And I get in and realize that there's this dreaded white paper attached to my windshield beneath the wiper. And I think to myself, "No...."

It was a ticket. But I had paid for my parking. This was not a fair ticket. So I'm thinking to myself, "Clearly they've made a mistake, and now I'm going to have to go online and dispute it because clearly their systems are inadequate. I had done everything right; clearly this was *their* problem."

But as I'm driving out of the underground parking lot, I realize that the steering wheel I'm holding belongs to a vehicle that I don't normally drive—because I drove our SUV rather than our family car, the van. And it hits me that I put in the wrong license plate number.

As Paul says in verse 15: "...if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you."

Perhaps similar to my own arrogance with the ticket, Paul's referring here, in this part of the letter, to some individuals—connected to the church somehow—who would consider themselves to be 'mature' and doing everything 'correctly,' but have a fundamental blind spot that is restricting them from seeing clearly—and it's having an impact, which is agonizingly irritating for Paul.

Because he's already demonstrated to this church, in every section and corner of this letter, that they are to model themselves *after Christ*. Take on the oneness of Christ. Seek the humility of Christ. Seek to be *in Christ, with Christ*, to do all things *through Christ*.

V. 17: "...just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do." So the Philippians' eyes are evidently wandering towards those who live according to a different goal or prize. And Paul's saying that *they've* set their mind on earthly things—which is a huge blind spot. *You*, on the other hand, are to have the same mind as Christ.

He then uses himself as an example here for them to follow—which we shouldn't assume was arrogant or prideful on the part of Paul, because it was a common thing to do in the ancient world. Education was often done in an apprenticeship type way, and discipleship in the church was no different. It was a highly effective model, actually.

I remember back in high school, I had a drama teacher—Mr. De Jager—from whom I learned all my dramatic inclinations. And I remember, during rehearsals, when he wanted you to speak or move in a certain way, if you weren't understanding or grasping it, he would jump up from his seat and come and enact it for you. And for a someone who's still learning, that's the ideal kind of teacher. He was giving us an example of what good acting looked like.

Paul was like a spiritual example to these early Christians. *"Keep your eyes on those who live as we do,"* Paul says to them. In other words, keep your eyes *off* of those who claim Christ but live otherwise.

And this is where he gets a bit paternal on them. Verse 18: *"For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live [or walk] as enemies of the cross of Christ."*

You all know the look, when you've told someone something over and over, and they're just not getting it. I've heard parents have this a lot with teenagers. And teachers with students. *I've told you this before.* I've told you again and again. Take the cotton balls out of your ears and pay attention.

But the stakes are higher here for Paul. Because notice in verse 18, he's tearing up over this. It's a big deal. Many are living and conducting themselves as enemies of the cross of Christ. Verse 19, *"Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things."*

So Paul's likely referring here to a group of 'Christians' who are assuming that they can now do whatever they want and thereby misusing the theology of grace, which was a significant problem in the early church. Paul's urging the Philippians not to look at them as exemplars because they've clearly taken a destructive path. They think they've got it right, but their arrogance is actually leading them to destruction.

"Their god isn't Christ, it's their stomach," he says. And he's not just referring to food, there, but to their appetites in general. Because the 'belly' was the seat of one's desires and emotions.

These individuals are living in a way that puts the 'belly' in the driver's seat. Their 'belly' is their god. Because, in their eyes, if all is grace, who cares? So they're using grace as an excuse for their own self-indulgence. (We might even go so far as to call them Christian hedonists: the kind of people who claim to be 'spiritual' but are obsessed with pleasure, because the satisfaction of their own desires is the highest good.)

Not so with you, says Paul. This is not the way of the Christian. Why? Because whose Name are you representing by calling yourself a Christian? Whose Name are you bearing when you say that you've been saved by grace?

Again, this isn't about you. It's all for Jesus.

And it's why we *depend* on Christ's intercession for us when he prays in John 17 that we would not be overwhelmed by the world: "*I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it,*" (John 17:14-15).

I saw someone just the other day wearing a t-shirt that said, in big letters, "In the world but not of the world," and I wondered to myself, 'What does that mean?' What does it mean to be 'in the world' but not 'of the world'?

Because when it comes to being self-indulgent about worldly things, we often think of the big ones like gambling, addiction, drinking, pornography, etc. And those do have significant consequences in the life and freedom of the Christian.

But every single one of us falls prey to being 'of the world' on some occasions, with our minds set on earthly things. We all give into a self-indulgent practice at some point or another. We all have blind spots. We all fixate our heads and hearts on earthly things *at some point*. And we often don't even realize when we do it.

I recently told someone that I'm not good at fasting—because I'm just a terrible person when I fast. I'm just a grump of a human being, simply because I don't like giving up the comfort of food. I don't like feeling uncomfortable. But what I'm really saying there is that I don't *want* to give up a worldly comfort *even if* it means drawing closer to Jesus.

And according to *Paul*, when Christ truly is the model that we seek to model ourselves after, then those comforts don't have the same impact. Because our entire 'appetite' is possessed by the glories available to us in Christ. All our desires are held by and satisfied in this prize that we have of being citizens of *heaven*, not slaves of the world.

"...*our citizenship is in heaven*," Paul says. We are governed by *this* Kingdom. Which, we have to remember, would have been a tall order for the Philippians.

Because if you remember from previous weeks, Philippi was a Roman colony. If you wanted an example of a city that was 'of the world,' it was Philippi. It had a special relationship with the emperor, and many military personnel were sent to live there to bolster the presence of Rome.

What this would mean is that Philippi would have had the task of boasting Roman religion and culture. The markets would be flooded with Roman propaganda and idol images. There might be a temple or two dedicated to one or more of the Roman gods. There would be the face of the emperor depicted on buildings. His name and glory would be acknowledged at every public event. This was who Rome claimed as 'Lord and Savior.'

This whole letter, then, has a bit of a political bent because the power of *Christ* as Lord and Saviour is being given precedence. When Paul says to the church that their citizenship is in heaven (and it's a very similar word to one used back in chapter one), this is subversive language.

Paul says that we are *still waiting for* a Lord and Savior from heaven, "*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.*"

We belong to and are *of* a different Kingdom. We live by different rules. Things and comforts don't have the same power over us. We're not dictated by them. Money and possessions, desires and temptations, comforts and security. These are all things we tend to *cling to* because they satisfy a longing in us.

But Paul's urging us to focus on a future fulfilment, a restored world where heaven and earth are one Kingdom and where our longings and appetites are no longer dominated by worldly comforts because the presence of God is sufficient for us.

Live, he says, as if *this* is what you most long for.

There's a woman I was recently able to get to know named Suzana. A number of years ago now, Suzana was diagnosed with stage three breast cancer, and she remembers praying desperately to God, "God, I know you can heal me. I know you can. But if there's a reason for me to go through this, then I'm okay."

And she said that she heard the voice of God say to her in response, "I *can* heal you, and we can go down that path. But if you choose this other path, then you will see me in ways that you have never seen me before."

And, as she explained it, in that moment she felt herself actively choosing the harder path—the path of longing rather than of comfort. Because she wanted to know God. She wanted to see Him.

And she said to me, it was the hardest year of her life physically, as she went through chemo treatments and suffered incredible fatigue. But it was the most enriching year of her life spiritually.

Now, I know for myself that when I'm living in my day-to-day routines, having my daily needs met, and comfortably moving from one task to the next, I don't long for the glories of heaven. I don't eagerly await my Saviour to come again. Because I don't take the time to think about it.

But when I do, when I pause to consider what life is about, I get overrun by this longing for understanding. And it's not nice. It's overwhelming. Because something is so obviously not complete. There are incomplete longings. Unsatisfied questions.

And I remember what C.S. Lewis once said in his book *Mere Christianity*, “If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.”

Do we realize that God has intentionally planted this desire for heaven within us? Where the glories of the divine meet with the wonder of His Creation? A world where all our longings and desires are satisfied because the Lamb on the throne is finally enough for us?

Paul was completely captivated by this kind of longing. Yes, he was under house arrest and didn’t know if he would live or die. But his encouragement is for us to consider this *now*.

And I wonder if this is what it means to be in the world but not of it. To have a kind of holy longing for what this world can’t satisfy. A holy dissatisfaction that recognizes that this world is yet waiting for fulfillment. Because Christ is not yet here in His fullness. The world has not yet been filled to the brim with the glory of God.

Then, I think, we possess a deeply felt longing for the presence of Christ to bring it all to fulfillment, to bring everything under His control.

Then, I think, we are truly citizens of heaven.