

To be found in Him

Good morning. If you are a guest with us today – my name is Scott Anderson and I'm on the pastoral team here – and we are very glad to have you with us today.

So let us once again declare and celebrate:

"He is Risen!"
"He is Risen indeed!"

I wonder how that news – that reality – sits with you today – in the light of your week or life of late...

I wonder what stirred in you or settled in you **this morning** as you awoke to this day...

As you thought about joining with all of us – to celebrate the Resurrected Life of Jesus...

What was the disposition – the mood – the state of your heart this morning toward God – in the light of your week or life of late?

Did you rise with confidence? Or emerge cowering? Or some mix of the two...?

What is it right now?

I ask the question, not simply because I'm a pastor and pastors ask these kinds of questions. I ask the question because it's one that I encounter at many turns... I know both of these experiences very well.

Days, weeks, seasons, where I've awakened to a day or gathered myself for Sunday worship – **with my soul hung low** – because, though He is Risen, **I've fallen**. Fallen in some way in regard to God's standards, and my own... Fallen in some way that has left me cowering... timid of soul... ashamed of my weakness... disappointed in my lack of discipline and the fickleness, or worse, corruption, of my own heart...

And this awareness – this reality – has left me **cowering before God**... Timid. Hiding. Reluctant to worship – reluctant to preach – reluctant to lift up unclean hands from an unclean heart. Needing to confess – but not with much confidence that God wants to hear it – again...

And then there have been **other days**, other Tuesdays and Sunday mornings when I have awakened **with my chest high** – with my heart high – because, somehow, **I've been faithful** of late. I've sought God this week. I've kept my Lenten fast – despite constant temptation. I've done what I was supposed to do, and **not done** what

I knew not to do. I've upheld my character. I've kept my heart clean, *or at least my hands*. I've met my standards, achieved my goals – which I somehow perceive as God's standards and goals...

In a way, though He is Risen, yes. More importantly, **I have risen!** Rather than fallen. *At least of late*. And so I've joined the day and the worship **with confidence**... With confidence that God hears me and shines on me.

I know I'm not alone in all this...

So, what about you?

What about you these days? What about you today?

What makes you confidence before God, or what makes you cower?

If you have a Bible on hand, I'd love to have you turn with me to **Philippians 3:1-11** – our Easter text.

If you are just joining us today, we are in the second half of a 10-part study Paul's letter to the Philippians – which normally would mean that you'd be a bit out of the loop – having missed the previous messages and passages.

But, thankfully, as we step in Philippians 3, we find Paul actually stepping away from the particulars of the Philippians – of what's

specifically been going on for them – and here he speaks a word that simply relates to all of us – wherever we are – in any and every age.

In truth, he gets at this question of ***what gives us confidence before God – or causes us to cower before God...?***

And let me say right now – wherever we are on that **soul-spectrum** – from confidence to cowering – Paul’s word to us today is **good news. Truly good news.**

So, let’s begin by listening to what the Spirit says through Paul.

And let me warn you, Paul talks here about circumcision. Which always feels a bit odd, but is integral to this whole conversation and the revelation of the gospel.

So, **Philippians 3:1-11.** (I’m reading from the updated NIV).

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. 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—though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

If someone else thinks they have reason 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.

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 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. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

Let's pray...

Heard in the context of everything else we've explored so far in this letter, this could seem like an odd thought excursion. What does this have to do with the Philippians – or us?

But the simple fact **is** that Paul understood the kind of challenges that the Philippians and all of us face - regularly. Particularly, the challenge of steering clear of a distorted gospel. A **false** gospel – that instead of liberating us, ends up taking us captive – captive to **our own achievements** or **our failings**...

A false gospel that leads to a **false confidence** or **robs us** of the confidence that is to be ours in Christ.

This is what Paul is getting at here, in verse 2, as he warns the Philippians, “**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 the Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh..."

Paul's language here is forceful, isn't it? Maybe not what we'd expect from a servant of Christ Jesus. But he does so for good reason.

You see, there was a group that was infiltrating so many of his churches – the churches that Paul started. A group of Jewish Christians – like Paul – who had embraced Jesus as their Messiah, like Paul – but who, unlike Paul, were teaching the Gentiles – non-Jews (which would have been the vast majority of the Philippians) that converting to Jesus wasn't enough, **they had to also be circumcised**. They had to **also** embrace the customs, practices and laws of the Jews.

Along with believing in Jesus, they had to do this, and not do that – and the list was long.

We read about this in **Acts 15:1** – where it says, "**Certain people** came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: 'Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.'"

Without this, they claimed, you could have **no confidence** before God... Unless you did this, and these other things, and didn't do **these** things – you could have **no confidence** before God... **No confidence** that God would treat you as a son or daughter. **No**

confidence that God would accept you and treat you as one of **His** people - His covenant people.

For that, you needed to be circumcised – the ancient Jewish symbol of the covenant. **And** keep the law – the moral law – **and** the ceremonial laws – the washings, the Sabbath rules, the food laws, **and on and on and on.**

If you did these, you could be confident before God...

But if not, **good luck.**

Now it's easy to hear this and dismiss this as some ridiculous and foreign religion.

And yet *don't we have our own lists?*

Lists of **spiritual practices** and disciplines, that, if maintained, give us confidence before God... But if **missed**, or outright neglected, cause us to cower before God...

Lists of **sacred sins**, that if avoided put us in good standing with God, but if embraced or worse, pursued, leave us with little hope.

Or maybe it's an ideal of **spiritual zeal** – passion – hunger – that if attained or renewed, leaves us standing tall with confidence before God, but if absent, leaves us cowering with insecurity and unworthiness.

Some of us searched through our list just this morning – on the drive here or during the first few songs – and as a result our head is high or our heart low...

Paul distills all this as "*putting confidence in the flesh*".

Which was something Paul knew first-hand.

Truth is, he'd been that person – he'd lived that way – **more than most**, really. As he explains to the Philippians...

v.4f – "*If someone else thinks they have reason 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.*"

If anyone had reason for confidence before God – **based on their own doing** – it was Paul.

He wasn't just circumcised, he was **an 8th-dayer!** (*His parents made sure to do it the way you were supposed to do it.*) He wasn't just an Israelite, he was of the tribe of **Benjamin!** (*One of the beloved sons of Jacob – who had no part in the betrayal of Joseph.*) As a Pharisee, he was a **meticulous** keeper of the ceremonial law, a **zealous** enemy of all heresy and wrong-doing, and a man of the **highest** moral standing.

If anyone were to enter the temple with confidence in the flesh – in themselves – in what they'd done, in what they'd attained, in what they'd not done, and what they'd never do – it was Paul.

If acceptance with God could be measured on a profit/loss statement – Paul’s would show **all profits. All gains.**

He had all the pedigree. All the disciplines. Degrees from the right school. From the right group. A champion of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Passionate for God.

And yet, Paul says – verse 7 – “**But whatever we gains** to me I now consider loss...”

Why? What happened?

Well, **he met Jesus!**

One day, Paul – the Pharisee – with all his confidence before God – on a mission **for** God, he believed – Paul found himself face to face with the resurrected Jesus – face to face with the gospel of Jesus...

Face to face with the gospel - **the incredible news** – that there is no ladder of self-advancement or self-achievement we must climb to get to God – but rather, **in Jesus,** God has climbed down **to get us.**

This is the gospel of Jesus. That God’s arms are open wide to us in Christ – no matter who we are **or what we’ve done** – **because of what Jesus has done...** Because of what Jesus has achieved for us – in his life, death and resurrection – and not because of anything we have or could ever achieve for Him...

Which rescues us all from whatever pedestal we are precariously attempting to attain and from whatever pit we feel we have irredeemably fallen into.

In Jesus, Paul discovered a gospel that has nothing to do with what we have or ever could achieve for God, but everything to do with what God in Christ has achieved for us...

And this gospel – Jesus – from that day forward, claimed Paul's life.

And in the light of this, Paul experienced a **radical re-valuation** of everything he previously considered **gain**... And loss, for that matter.

Listen to what he says... **Philippians 3:7f**

"But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 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."

Not on the basis of **our performance** (whether years ago or last weekend) – **but solely on the basis of the mercy and grace of God – revealed in Jesus Christ.**

In Paul's encounter with Jesus, Paul came to realize that all his attempts at righteousness could never attain for him what Jesus offered him in grace – **namely, Himself.**

Do you hear that?

This is the gift of the gospel – not simply righteousness, acceptance and right standing with God – **but Jesus Himself – being found in Jesus – and in His righteousness** – through all of our ups and downs, victories and failings.

What an incredible gift of grace! For those of us who work so hard to hold it all together and those of us who feel like we’ll never have it together...

This is the gospel – not a righteousness – a right standing with God – **that comes by our own effort** – but a righteousness – a right standing with God – that comes **by grace through faith in Jesus.**

So that we can stand today embraced by God – regardless of our achievement or our failing – **because we now stand in Christ...**

Because we have been **found in Him...**

No wonder Paul came to consider everything else as loss, worthless, compared to knowing Christ – gaining Christ and being found in Him.

In truth, **this is what the gospel DOES** – it doesn’t just embrace us as we are, but **it causes** in us **a radical re-assessment, a radical re-valuation** of the treasures of this world – and slowly but

surely awakens us to the glory of Jesus and the gospel – causing us to treasure Jesus and the gospel more and more... above all else...

So much so, that Paul's confession turns into a deep soul cry –

v.10-11.

"I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead."

This from a man **who knew Christ deeply already** – but who's experience of Christ and the gospel made him all the more hungry for every facet of his life to be overtaken by Jesus..

Because, for Paul, **nothing beats grace** – the grace of being **found in Jesus**.

Which we can celebrate today because the resurrection of Jesus – the Resurrected Life of Jesus – means that this grace is open and available to us – to you and to me – by grace through faith. Just as it was for Paul.

That's why Paul refers to knowing "**the power of his resurrection**" **before** "*participation in his sufferings*".

It seems out of order.

Doesn't the cross come before the resurrection?

Yes, for Jesus. **But not for us.**

As one **theologian explains,**

"For Christ, death preceded resurrection, but for the Christian who sets out to follow the Lord along this path the power of the risen Christ is the first fact of experience..." (Alec Motyer)

In other words, without the resurrection, we would not know Jesus in any way. Not in any personal way. Maybe as a fascination of history, but not in any personal, saving way.

All of our knowing of Jesus – all of our experience of Jesus and with Jesus is, first and foremost, an experience of the power of His resurrection – an experience of the Resurrected Life of Jesus.

And because of this we can have confidence today.

"For it is *we who* *are the circumcision [the covenant people of God], we who serve God by the Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh..."*

Because we don't have to. ***Our confidence is in Christ...***

Where's your confidence today?

Did you come in here today confident in yourself or covering because of yourself?

Whatever your situation, Jesus invites you today to lay aside **all that you have done**, and place your hope and confidence in **what He has done for you...** that He might lift you up and cause you to **rest and rejoice** in Him – today and forever...

Come to Christ today.

Come to the Crucified and Risen One.

And be found in Him.

Amen. **Let's pray.**

invitation to the Table -----

Come with **empty hands** to receive what Christ offers.