

## Sermon – 31/01/2010 am

### Knowing Christ

Study Text: Philippians 3:10-11

Our daughter recently said her marriage vows and went to live with her husband. She promised to love him and live with him as his wife till 'death do us part'. But now she is finding out there is a lot more to marriage than saying those vows – as essential as they are. Imagine the things she is learning about her husband. He is not perfect after all! She is learning how he likes his eggs cooked. She is learning what brand of toothpaste he likes and how he squeezes the tube! She is on a steep learning curve, and will continue learning about him all his life.

Our relationship with Jesus is often described in terms of marriage. *Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church* (Ephesians 5:28). In a sense we get married to Christ when we believe in him. He calls us to himself and we are born again of the Spirit of God. We become a new creation in Christ Jesus. We enter into an intimate and exclusive relationship with Christ. God declares this in announcing that we are in a new covenant. He declares 'I will be your God and you shall be my people'.

This is justification. This is what Paul was talking about in the preceding verses of this chapter – the *righteousness which is from God by faith* (3:9). God has made us alive together with Christ and raised us up together and *made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus* (Ephesians 2:5). I still remember our daughter sitting with her new husband at the wedding breakfast.

The verses before us today speak of knowing Christ and sharing in his sufferings. These verses speak about living together with Christ, about getting to know him more and more each day of our lives. They speak about growing in our knowledge of him and in our love for him. Wonderfully we do not find any faults in Christ, as our daughter will surely find with her husband. Christ is perfect. He is the Son of God. To get to know him is a delight. This getting to know Christ and be changed by him is the process called sanctification.

### Know Jesus

Paul was writing these words almost thirty years after Christ met him on the Damascus road. On that day he came to know Jesus as Saviour and Lord. His life took a complete U turn. Whatever he previously counted as profits he now counted as loss. But that was just the beginning of walking together with Christ. Just the beginning of getting to know Christ. He writes here in verse 10 *that I may know him*. This is not in the past tense but the aorist tense. At the time of writing this letter he was still getting to know Christ.

Paul was willing to share his amazing testimony but that was not the focus of his life. He did not keep looking back to say 'yes I am saved and I am safe now'. He did not go around holding up his baptism certificate or a book of his achievements as a Christian. Paul went around holding up the word of life. He went around preaching Jesus Christ and him crucified. He invited people to look at the work of grace in his life. He wanted them to see Christ living in him, not just yesterday but today. *Brothers join in following my example* he writes later in this chapter (3:17).

The apostle Paul did not simply want to know **about** Christ. He was not content with the facts of Christ's life, death and resurrection. He wanted to know Christ the person, the unique person who is the Son of God. I listened to a man the other who said he had read the gospel of Luke forty times.

He was the man who acted the part of Jesus in the 'Jesus film'. He knew about Jesus life and death in great detail but he had not come to know Christ personally. He had a lot of head knowledge but no heart knowledge. Head knowledge is necessary, but without heart knowledge it is useless. Head knowledge has no power to change one's life and destiny.

## **Know the Power of His Resurrection**

Paul preached *Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God* (I Corinthians 1:24). He preached Christ crucified and Christ risen from the dead. Paul prayed that the believers at Ephesus would *know what is the exceeding great power working within us who believe* (Ephesians 1:19). He said it is the power God worked when he raised Jesus from the dead. It is the power of the resurrection.

People are full of praise when doctors with great skill and modern machines resuscitate a person. This is good but it has nothing to do with the power of the resurrection. God raised Jesus from the dead on the third day. He was not resuscitated by any man or by God. He was resurrected with a glorious new body. He returned into heaven in this body. This is real power. This is the power Paul wanted to know and wanted other believers to know. It was not just a power working in the apostles but in all who believe – the power of the resurrection.

Paul was living at a time when Rome ruled the world. The power of Rome was universally feared. Paul was being held in a Roman prison. Rome might decide to put him to death at any moment. Paul knew about the power of Rome. He also knew about powers greater than Rome. He knew about the supernatural power of Satan. He wrote to the Ephesians warning them about this power. *We wrestle ... against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age* (Ephesians 6:12). But Paul knew the greatest power of all is the power of the resurrection.

God's power is revealed in the creation (Romans 1:20), but it is the power of God displayed in the resurrection of Jesus that changed the life of Paul. He experienced the power of Christ in the gospel (Romans 1:16). This is the power that made us alive when we were dead in our sin. We might call this redemptive power. But more, it is the power by which we will be resurrected with a new body, a body fit for eternity in heaven. Christ is the firstborn from the dead. Paul wanted to know more and more of this power of the resurrection.

While Paul desired to depart and be with Christ, while he desired to be clothed with his dwelling which is from heaven (II Corinthians 5:3), he was not sitting around waiting for that day. He wanted to know more of Christ and his power each and every day. United with Christ he wanted to live a holy life, a life pleasing to Christ. He could do this only in the power of Christ. He longed for deliverance not only from the penalty of sin but the power of sin, and eventually the presence of sin. He wanted the power to transform his life and live according to the will of God just as Jesus did.

## **Know the Fellowship of His Sufferings**

It is strange to find the words 'power' and 'suffering' in the one sentence as we do here in verse 10. How is the power of the resurrection related to the sufferings of Christ? Paul the Pharisee knew Jesus had been crucified and thought that he was still in the grave – or maybe the disciple's stole his body and hid it somewhere. When Jesus appeared to him on the road his whole picture of Jesus was shattered. In the light of the resurrection he now saw that Jesus was who he said he was, and that his suffering and death was the will of God for Jesus.

Jesus was humiliated in life and in death. He suffered at the hands of wicked men in this sinful world. Why? Firstly because it was the will of God to afflict him and crush him (Isaiah 53). *Though the Son of God he learned obedience by the things he suffered* (Hebrews 5:8). God requires

complete submission to his will – his will after all is perfect. Men in their sin rebel against the will of God. Jesus was tested; he was severely tested as he moved towards the fulfilment of his Father's will. In the end he declared 'not my will but yours be done'. He went all the way to the cross in obedience to the will of God.

Such submission staggered the apostle Paul. As a Pharisee he thought God's will was simply to keep the law. There was nothing about suffering in the righteousness he once claimed. He thought suffering was for the weak; that was until he met the risen Christ.

Secondly, Christ also suffered because he was living in a fallen world. Here was a holy man living in an unholy world. *If the world hates you know that it hated me before* said Jesus (John 15:18). A holy person cannot expect to live without suffering in this world. The apostles rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name (Acts 5:41). Paul wrote earlier in this letter *to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him but to suffer for his sake* (1:29). Paul was rejoicing even as he sat in chains in prison in Rome. But still he wanted to share more in the sufferings of Christ.

Of course Paul did not go around looking for trouble just so he could suffer and even get executed. He went around preaching the gospel and seeking to live as Christ did. He realised that the more he lived as Christ did, the more he made Christ his example, the more he would suffer in this fallen world. This is what Jesus meant when he said 'take up your cross and follow me'. Is this your experience?

## Know Him Fully

*Being conformed to his death, if by any means I may attain to the resurrection of the dead* (3:10-11). Paul was not expressing any doubts here as to the bodily resurrection. The word 'by any means' or 'somehow' simply suggests uncertainty as to whether he would be in the grave or still alive when Jesus returned in glory.

The word resurrection here carries a prefix meaning 'out' – the 'out resurrection' of the dead. The significance of this is not clear. But basically there are two resurrections, one spiritual when we are born again, and one physical or bodily (*cf* John 5). Paul's life was in the balance as he waited Roman judgment. At the end of this chapter he writes of heaven and of waiting for Christ *who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to his glorious body* (3:21). Paul was not just sitting waiting for this day as we have said, but this coming day did affect how he lived in the present.

Jesus Christ his Lord suffered greatly as he obeyed God's will. Paul wanted to know more of the suffering of obedience and of living a holy life that he might be ready to meet Christ in his heavenly glory. *Now I know in part, but then I shall know even as I am known* he wrote (I Corinthians 13:12). He was not yet perfect but he was pressing on in Christ in the power of the resurrection that he might attain to the resurrection of the dead.

*If we died with him we shall also live with him*

*If we endure /suffer with him we shall also reign with him* (II Timothy 2:11-13).

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