We are continuing our study of the book of Philippians and I would like to begin by telling you a story I heard a while back.

This lawyer was walking along the beach one day when he saw this bottle that was washed up on the sand, so he picked it up and rubbed it and a genie came out. The genie said, “I’ve got to give you 3 wishes, what do you do?” The man said, “Well, I’m a lawyer.” The genie said, “Well, because you’re a lawyer, everything you ask for, I’m going to give all the lawyers in the world double what you asked for.” The lawyer said, “OK, I wish to receive a million pounds”. The genie said, “OK, you’ve got it, but all the other lawyers in the world get 2 million pounds.”

“What’s your 2nd wish?” He said, “Well, I wish to receive a Porsche.” The genie said, “Well, you’re very generous, because you get your car but all the other lawyers in the world get two Porsches.” He said, “What’s you 3rd wish?” He thought for a moment and said, “Well, I wish to donate a kidney”.

The point of the story is that sometimes people are not as rich as they think they are. You know people who have a lot of things that we would call valuable but there can be a time in their lives where their values are reshuffled, their priorities are recalibrated. And suddenly those things that they thought were so valuable just aren’t worth as much as they used to be.

Now a day like that came into the life of a Jew from Tarsus named Saul and it changed him forever. He once thought he was so rich in many things, but because of that one day. He realised he was not that rich at all and his value system was completely reoriented. He learned that you are never going to enjoy true joy until you discover what true treasure is.

And today I want to share with you what he learned. Philippians 3:1-11. “Finally my brothers rejoice in the Lord, it is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again. And it is a safe guard for you; watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus and who, put no confidence in the flesh. Though I myself have such reasons for such confidence, if anyone else thinks he has reasons 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, persecuted the church, as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. But whatever was to my profit, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For whose sake I have lost all things, I consider them rubbish, 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 and is by faith.”

“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship in the sharing of his sufferings, becoming like him in his death and so, some how, to attain to the resurrection from the dead”.

Remember Paul is writing to a church in need of a joy transfusion. And so he says to them, “finally brothers” And notice that it is Biblical for a preacher to say, “Finally” then go on for a long time. He says, “Finally” in the middle of a book and then goes on for 2 more chapters. But he said, “Finally my brothers, rejoice in the Lord, this is a safe guard for you.”

Paul wants the Philippians to have a lasting joy and notice it depends on self doctrine. In other words, it depends on them having the proper understanding of the gospel of grace.
A vote of no confidence

You see, grace and joy go together. The Greek word for grace is Charis and the Greek word for joy is Chara. And you’re never going to have lasting joy until you embrace the gospel of grace. If your righteousness depends on performance, you’re full of anxiety.

There’s always one more Bible study you could have had. One more chapter you could have memorised. One more good deed you could have done. One more pound you could have given to a good cause.

If you’re salvation depends on your performance, your never going to have lasting joy. Now this is the problem of legalism. Of making human righteousness the basis of salvation. That’s why in Galatia when Paul was writing to the Galatian churches about this exact problem, of people wanting to add the gospel of works to the gospel of grace.

He said in Galatians 4:15, “What has happened to all your joy?” Now he wants the Philippian church to have joy and the best way to safe guard your joy, is to learn to rejoice in the Lord and not in yourself. But the problem is that Satan wants to plant in good, healthy churches, people that want to advocate a grace plus works gospel.

Now that’s what happening in Philippi and Galatia. These Judaizers come up and say, “Yes, Jesus is good and Jesus is great, we believe in grace, we believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus and circumcision. So just be circumcised and add that to the gospel and you’ll be saved.”

And in every generation there are people who want to add to the gospel of grace and if you let them, your joy is going to go out the window. Paul says in Philippians 3:2, “Watch out for these dogs, these doers of evil, these mutilators of the flesh.”

That’s pretty strong language but Paul was tired of these guys who had been dogging him and his mission work for years. It is interesting that Jews used to call Gentiles dogs. Paul turns it around and says, “They’re the dogs.” He says, “I wish they would just mutilate themselves”.

Now if those words aren’t offensive to you, it’s because you don’t cherish the gospel as much as Paul does. Paul gets fighting mad when people start messing with the gospel.

I remember a story about a man who used to preach on the streets of Britain and this one man came up to him and said, “you know, there are hundreds of religions in Britain and everyone says they have the truth, how are we supposed to know what’s right?” And the man said, “Did I hear you say there are hundreds of religions, I thought there are only 2? “Now granted there are different variations, but there are only 2 in the world.” The man said, “What do you mean?” He said, “Well, there is one, of all the religions of the world based on what you have to do, and there is only one religion in the world that’s based on what God has done.”

You see Paul does not have a problem with circumcision, but he has a big problem with acquiring any religious activity to supplement the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. He would rather fight than switch gospels.

And the reason he was so critical is because you miss out in joy, when you misplace your confidence. If you put your confidence in your ability to do anything to please God, you’re going to loose joy. Paul had to learn to give his flesh a vote of no confidence.
A vote of no confidence

I want you to understand when Paul talks about placing no confidence in the flesh; he’s not just talking about the worst of man. When we think of the flesh, we think about drunkenness, and immorality and greed and idolatry. That’s part of the flesh. But he’s not just talking about the worst that is in man; he’s talking about the best that is in man.

The part of man that tries to do good. The part of man that studies his Bible. The part of man that shares his faith. The part of man that goes to church. He says, “I don’t place any confidence in that either.”

Flesh is that self-confident spirit that says, “I have the capacity to please God by myself.” It’s flesh that makes you think you are richer than you really are. Now nobody learned this lesson better than Paul did.

And I want to share with you today 2 radical ideas that Paul learned that change his life. No1 was the radical idea that my righteousness gains nothing. You see, in that text Paul says, “There are 2 types of righteousness that are available to you today”.

There is divine righteousness that is the gift of God and there is human righteousness that you accumulate as you do religious things. Now most people prefer the 2nd kind of righteousness but we just tend to trust anything that we can make a contribution too.

There was a cake mix company that came up with a new way to make cakes. The cake was very moist and very tasty. And it was so easy, it was all in the package and all you had to do was take of the top, pour it into a bowl, add water and you get a nice cake.

They had a big advertisement campaign; they thought it would sell like crazy, but they couldn’t get women to buy it. So they paid people to find out why ladies wouldn’t buy this recipe. They found out something very interesting.

So they took off the shelves and changed it a little. So they put it back on the shelves. This time you had to pour it into a bowl, add water and one egg. And it sold like crazy. Do you know why? They learned ladies don’t trust it, if they can’t add to it.

Now we are the same way with our salvation. We like that kind of righteousness that has to be added too. That’s more trust worthy we think. Now Paul knows about that. He was the No1 draft pick of the Jewish religion. He was a model example of how you acquire those things that make you rich in human righteousness.

Listen again to what he says from the Living Bible. “If anyone thought that he would have a reason to save himself, it would be I.” Paul had those things that would make you rich in human righteous.

He says, “I was circumcised on the 8th day, I wasn’t some Johnny come lately to the Jewish religion, I was of the stock of Israel, I was of the elite tribe of Benjamin, my parents were Hebrews, I spoke the Hebrew language in a day where most of you don’t even know it.”

He says, “Look at my heritage”. People do that today don’t they? I’ve been going to church for 70 years. My daddy was a preacher. My granddad was an elder. My great granddad was one of the first members of the church. And we boast and place confidence in our heritage.
A vote of no confidence

And Paul also had performance advantages. He says, “Check me out, I was a Pharisee, he says there was only 6000 allowed in that club and I was one of them.” He says, “not only that but according to my zeal, I loved Judaism so much I travelled all over the world to kill people who opposed it, and check out my legalistic righteousness, try to find one thing I was doing wrong in the law of Moses.”

Now when he says, “I was blameless, faultless”. He doesn’t mean he never sinned, he means that even when he sinned, he did exactly what the Law of Moses told him what to do. Listen again to verse 6, “No one could find fault with the way I obeyed the Law of Moses”.

People do that today too. They brag about their performance. I’ve been teaching Bible class 33 years. I’ve been an elder of the church 20 years. I’ve been this and I’ve been that, I’ve been here, I’ve been there. I’ve given this, I’ve built that, I wrote this, and I did this.

When Paul is criticising human righteousness, he’s not doing it as an outsider. He didn’t write as a have not, he wrote as somebody who had everything. But then he realised one day, he had nothing. One day changed his life. He’s on the road to Damascus, he’s going to persecute some more Christians and add some more human righteousness to his bank account. And suddenly he encountered a blinding light that threw him to the ground.

And sometimes, you’ve got to have your eyes blinded before you see straight. You see, what happened that day, when Paul met Jesus Christ for the first time in his life, he got a glimpse of perfect righteousness and he suddenly realised he was on the wrong road in more ways than one.

One glimpse of the perfect righteousness of Jesus and suddenly he realised all of his righteousness had gained him nothing. Now he understood what the Old Testament said when he quoted in Romans 3:10, “As it is written: there is no one righteous, not even one.” He might have even of added, ”Not even me”.

Paul is trying to say, “I worked myself to the bone, I piled up one credit after another of human righteousness, and now I realise that if you haven’t done it my way, you haven’t missed a thing because all of that gained me nothing.”

By the way, this text stands as a strong warning to anybody here today who thinks all God is looking for is moral living and some strong convictions. Let me as blunt as I can. Hell is going to be full of nice people with strong convictions. As far as human righteousness goes nobody has more credits than Paul and he was on his way to Hell.

God is looking for more than a moral life and some strong convictions. God is looking for surrender to the gospel. So Paul says later, after he said in Romans 3:10, “No one is righteous” down in verse 20+21 of Romans 3, “But a righteousness from God apart from law has been made known, to which the prophets testify, this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”

The righteousness of God demands a vote of no confidence in the flesh. You’ve got to turn away from your own view of your goodness and you’ve got to accept God’s view of your goodness. And then you’ve got to turn from your goodness to God’s. You’ve got to understand that my righteousness gains nothing.

And that leads to the 2nd really radical idea that changed Paul’s life and that is, that my faith gains his righteousness.
A vote of no confidence

When somebody asks you what the good news is, don’t tell that they can be saved. Every religion in the world says that. Every religion in the world has a way to be saved that’s not the good news. The good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is not just that people can be saved, it is that people can saved by faith, instead of by works.

The good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that salvation is not a matter of climbing up stairs; it is a lift from almighty God. So Peter says in 1 Peter 3:18, “For Christ died for our sins once for all, the righteous, for the unrighteous to bring you to God.”

You don’t step your way to God with human righteousness; you receive righteousness when Christ brings you by faith. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “As God made him, who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Once Paul got a glimpse of perfect righteousness, that day on the road to Damascus, he never again preached anything but the Jesus plus nothing plan of salvation. He could afford to surrender everything else but not Christ.

In fact, once he found the real treasure, it’s amazing how unimportant all those other riches were any more. He said in Philippians 3:7+8, “What was once to my profit, I now consider loss for the sake of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord. What is more, I consider everything a loss for the surpassing greatness of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord. I count it as rubbish.”

Paul says, “It’s just garbage, and I’m happy to call it garbage because I don’t want anymore the righteousness that comes from keeping laws. I want the righteousness that comes by faith in Jesus Christ.” The message says, “I’ve dumped it all in the trash, so that I could embrace Christ.”

That’s the gospel and it’s radical. And the radical part is not that you don’t want to embrace Christ. The radical part is that we don’t want to embrace Christ only. We want to add something to the gospel. And I know we are like that because some people say, “you have just made that sound too easy, you make the gospel sound too cheap.”

I want to answer that by telling you a story. G Campbell Morgan was preaching in England one time and a miner came up to him and said, “I would love to believe that God could forgive my sins, if I would just trust Christ but that just sounds too cheap.” And Morgan said to him, “were you working in the mines today?” The man said, “Yes”. He said, “How did you get out?” He said, “I got in the cage which lifted me up?”

He said, “How much did you have to pay for that?” He said, “I didn’t have to pay anything, it was free.” He said, “it was free, well weren’t you afraid it was too cheap to be safe?” He said, “Oh, no, they spent a lot of money to build that shaft and put that cage down there.” And then suddenly the miner realised that just because something is free, doesn’t mean it’s cheap.

It is an affront to God, that he would shed the blood of His perfect righteous Son for you and then you say, “That’s too cheap to believe in.” Never tell God the gospel of God is cheap. It’s free, but it comes at a great price. And it’s the only way righteousness comes. Jesus Christ did not come to contribute your salvation; he came to pay for it.

Look again at Philippians 3:9 with me, ”God’s way of making us right with him depends on faith”. And what is that? It’s counting on Christ alone. Faith is placing confidence in Christ’s work and acknowledging no confidence in my flesh.
A vote of no confidence

Voting no confidence in my ability to obtain righteousness and total confidence in Christ’s ability to give me righteousness, when I trust him.

There was a missionary who went to the Pacific islands and he was looking for a way to communicate the idea of faith to the natives because he couldn’t find a word in their language that he could use for faith. One day this native had a crisis and said to him, “Please, may I come and lean heavily on you?” And then the missionary realised he had discovered their word for faith.

Faith in Christ means no confidence in my flesh. It means I’m leaning heavily on Christ for my salvation. Now are you doing that today? You’re not going to have lasting joy, until you learn to do that. Let me show you what that is going to mean for you. It’s going to mean No1, rejoicing solely in the work of Christ.

What makes you happy, the Lord or what you do for the Lord? I mean when you do things for the Lord, when you serve the Lord, you get joy from that. And that’s good. But I’m asking you what makes you ultimately happy, what you do for God, or what God’s done for you?

I heard a story about a man who got to the gates of heaven and Peter was there to meet him, and said, “can I come into heaven?” and Peter said, “well, it depends, I’ve got to see if you’ve got 1000 points.” He said, “A 1000 points.” Peter said, “Yeah, tell me what you’ve done in your life.”

The man said, “well, I’m sure I’ve got a 1000 points, I’ve been a Christian almost all of my adult life, I’ve been a faithful husband and father, I’ve got 3 kids, one is a preacher, one is a missionary, my daughter is a nurse in the slums, I went one night a week to work with her, I was a faithful member of the church, I was an elder for 20 years, I supported mission works all over the world, I witnessed my faith in my job, I anonymously helped build a hospital, how much is that?” Peter looked and said, “that’s one point what else have you done?” And at that point the man said, “Lord have mercy”. And Peter said, “That’s a 1000 points, come on in.”

You see, loved ones Paul knew what he was saying when he said, “Rejoice in the Lord it is a safe guard for you”. It’s the only way to keep that joy lasting and permanent, it’s when that joy is in the Lord.

Now let me tell you a practical way to know if you are rejoicing solely in the work of Christ. It’s your passion for worship. Because Paul said back in verse 3, “It is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the spirit of God.”

What he means is, whenever it dawns on our little minds, whenever it breaks through, when you finally understand that you are righteous in the eyes of God because of the gift of Jesus Christ. Do you know what is going to happen? The Holy Spirit is just going to prompt out bursts of worship in your life.

You’re going to love to worship. You can’t wait for church to start. You won’t ever want church to end. And not just on Sundays. You could be driving your car and start to think about what Christ has done for you and you start crying and you have to pull over on the side of the road and worship for a minute.

Now legalists go to church because they have to but grace centred Christians can’t wait to get to church, because they have to worship by the Spirit of God. And that’s you; you’re leaning heavily on Christ.
A vote of no confidence

But if don’t get excited about worship then maybe you’re putting confidence in the wrong place.

Grace and joy go together. It means you’re leaning solely in the work of Christ and No2 it’s going to mean releasing anything that competes with Christ. When Paul says, “I count it all a loss”.

That same word is used back in Acts 27. Remember when Paul was on a ship and it had all this valuable cargo and it was worth a whole lot, until there was a storm at sea and suddenly they had to throw stuff over board to save their lives. And that cargo that was so valuable, all of a sudden it’s just lost. It doesn’t count so much anymore when you are trying to save your life.

And that’s the word that Paul uses. And what he’s saying is, “You need to throw away anything that is hindering your relationship to Christ. And notice Paul didn’t just throw away junk for Jesus. He threw away stuff that once was a tremendous value to him.

Listen, Christ is not just better than the worse stuff in life, he’s better than the best stuff in life. We need to hear people say that they threw away things that the world said was absolutely valuable because it is rubbish when I compare it to Christ. And that’s what it means to lean heavily on Christ.

And finally No3, it will mean rehearsing daily the death and resurrection of Christ. Do you remember when they brought out a new game called trivial pursuit? I think Paul would say that is how many people spend their lives, in trivial pursuits.

Paul said, “I didn’t know it was trivial, I thought what I was going after in my life was really valuable but one day I saw Jesus Christ and now I realise that all that stuff I was trying to get, it’s just rubbish.” “I have a new passion now, and my new passion is to know Jesus Christ my Lord. Nothing competes with that”.

Now how do you know Jesus Christ as Lord? You know Jesus Christ is Lord, when your willing everyday to die and live for him. And that’s what Paul said in verse 10, “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his suffering.” He says, “I want Jesus Christ so bad, I want to live like him and wherever Jesus lives, that’s where I want to be.”

Notice he put resurrection first. Do you know why? Because you see, the resurrection is not just a doctrine, it’s an event. It’s powerful to the Christian today. And when you know the power of the living Christ, you are more increasingly to go into places and suffer for Christ.

When the living Christ is inside you and the power that raised him from the dead is filled up in your life suddenly your willing to go anywhere and do anything to suffer for Christ. Because that is all you really care about, is living and dying for Christ everyday.

And loved ones if you’re not a Christian this morning then you too can live for Christ. You can live for Christ by dying with Christ in the waters of baptism.

If after reading this you want to know more about placing your confidence in the flesh or about grace or if this sermon has raised other questions in your thoughts then please just contact me and I will get back to you as soon as possible.

God bless and thanks for taking the time to grow in your understanding of God’s Word.