

## KNOWING YOU, JESUS

**Speaker:** Rev. Dr. Cecil Clements

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**Scripture:** Philippians 3:1-14

Paul writes, *“Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.*

*<sup>2</sup> Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; <sup>3</sup> for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh, <sup>4</sup> although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: <sup>5</sup> circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.*

*<sup>7</sup> But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> More than that, I count all things to be loss <sup>[c]</sup> in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, <sup>9</sup> and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, <sup>10</sup> that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; <sup>11</sup> in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”*

*“<sup>12</sup> Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. <sup>13</sup> Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*

Let's try to unpack these 14 verses in which Paul has given us quite a handful.

Paul says, “Finally,” as he starts this third chapter, meaning that he is coming to the end of this epistle. But then he says: To write the same things again is no trouble for me. I don't mind repeating myself. I don't mind repetitions. Why? Because it's a safeguard for you to hear these things more often. As I keep on bringing them to mind, they will come to mind when you need them.

It's a short letter which he's writing from prison, one of the prison epistles, but one that has so much packed in it. 1:6 is this beautiful verse that says: I'm confident of this very thing that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to its completion until the day of Christ Jesus. That verse has been such a stimulant for us, such an encouragement as we've looked at our lives. Lord, are You still at work in me? Lord, I've been failing you so often, but have You given up? Lord, are You still doing this work that You talk about? And the good news is that He is! God is not a quitter. God is not someone who gives up on us. God never gives up on us. The work that He starts, He will continue to do. Maybe there are times when we hold our will in front of Him and say, “I'm not going to let You,” and God bides His time until there's a softening; and then He continues to move and work His will in us.

There could be times when we question! A loved one that we are praying for, somebody who seems to be far away from God, or somebody who has done something. You ask: Lord, are You in touch with that person? God's promise to us: I'll never leave; I'll never forsake. The work that I start in you, I will complete. And the work starts, beloved, when we accept Him. Then He continues, continues, continues, till one day we will see Him. That's what Paul is saying.

Then he goes on and says, “But there are many people who are talking about Jesus, but they are doing it out of their own self-will. They are doing it out of envy and vanity rather than having a true motive. But then he says: It doesn’t matter if I get the glory from it or not. What matters is that Christ is proclaimed at every given point.

I remember when I was in seminary, I came across a one-liner: “There’s no limit to what a man/woman can do if he/she doesn’t mind who gets the credit.” Paul is saying that many people are proclaiming for whatever wrong motive, but he’s happy that Christ is proclaimed.

Then in ch. 1:21 he says, “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” When you think about him sitting between two Roman guards, chained to them, unable to move! Can you imagine him thinking about all that has gone past in his life? The missionary journeys that he has undertaken, the times that he has been thrown out of windows, thrown out of ships, been beaten, flogged! And yet he says, “For me to live is Christ, every moment that I live, I breathe Him. To die – that would be so wonderful. I’d get to be with Jesus eternally. That is gain.”

We see Paul’s dilemma. He says, “That would be gain for me. But what about you? If I stay, I can still be of help to you. <sup>22</sup>But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me.” We have his fruitful labor today; we are reading from it. This epistle was written from prison – fruitful labor. He continues: <sup>23</sup>I’m hard-pressed. I don’t know what to do. <sup>24</sup>Yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary, for your sake. Then he comes to a resolution. <sup>25</sup>Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith.

One wouldn’t blame him for thinking: Lord, I’ve had it! This is enough, Lord. I’ve reached the end. Just let me go. Take me. But yet he thinks: Wait a minute! If I stay, I can still do something. Sometimes I hear people who say, “I’m done! I just want the Lord to take me.” And I always tell them, “The moment that God’s script for you has ended, you will not be here one extra second. Till that time, God is still writing, in and through your life, every moment, every day.” As long as we have breath, God’s work with us is still unfinished.

Then ch. 3 where we have that beautiful kenosis or the emptying. It talks about Jesus and he says, “Have this attitude in you that was in Christ, who though He existed in the form, did not regard equality. He talks about how Jesus came with humility, obedience, embraced death, and he says that these are the things that are important.

3:2 Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision.

What is false circumcision? And Paul says, “Let me tell you what true circumcision is, so that you recognize what is false. True circumcision has three components:

- 1) Worship in the Spirit of God
- 2) Glory in Christ Jesus
- 3) No confidence in the flesh, which means living by the Spirit of God.

As we go through these 14 verses, I want you to constantly stop when the Spirit of God pricks us and think whether it applies to us. Is Paul talking to me?

### **Worship:**

Where are you, beloved, in your worship of God? How many hours do you spend worshiping Him? Is it only these 15-20 minutes that we worship Him together here? Is that the extent of your worship? Is that the extent of your worship? Or do you worship every day? Do you sing songs to Him every day? Paul says that is important; that is what it means to be a true follower of Jesus – that we worship.

### **Glory in Christ Jesus:**

Then he says that we need to glorify God in Christ Jesus. Where do we stand in that? Jesus Himself said, "Let your light so shine before men that they may glorify My Father in heaven." Do we glorify the Father in everything that we are doing? In our behavior, in our thoughts, in our attitude, in the quiet moments when we are alone? Is God glorified? Elsewhere, Paul would say that we should shine as stars in a perverse and evil generation. Shine as stars in the midst of the evil that we see all around us. Are we shining, beloved?

### **Put no confidence in the flesh:**

In other words, that we live our lives in the Spirit of God, through the Spirit of God. Every day we make decisions that either go with the flesh or go with the Spirit. Every decision has that choice – to go with the flesh or in the Spirit. How often does the Spirit win? How often are we living by the flesh? All these things that the flesh has, the things that we have acquired, a name that we have, a pedigree, the home we were born into, how many letters we have before or after our name! Paul says: If I were to stand in front of you and talk about pedigree, none of you would match the pedigree that I have – an Israelite from the tribe of Benjamin, a Pharisee who persecuted the church with zeal. As to the law? Perfect! But all those things I consider rubbish!

It begs the question: What do you consider good and true, Paul? What is it that we ought to be focusing on? If not all these things of the false circumcision and the flesh and so on, what should we focus on? Paul outlines in vv. 8-11, he says very clearly, "If you're talking about wanting to be a disciple of Jesus, here are six or seven things that must be integral to your life."

#### **1. Know Christ.**

I remember when I was finishing up in seminary, and was ready to come back, there were no openings. So we had to stay one more year. I was wrestling with God saying, "Lord, seven years we've been waiting to return, and now the door is closed." I felt the Lord saying, "This year, I want you to spend getting to know Me better." I distinctly remember this conversation. I said, "Lord, for the last seven years, that's what I've been doing," and He said, "No! For the last seven years you've got to know things about Me; now I want you to get to know Me."

There's a big difference about getting acquired knowledge about somebody and getting to know that person. I still remember I was chomping at the bit, and I was saying, "Yes, Lord, but still we want to go....." A cousin of mine visited me, and I told him what had happened. He asked if he could pray for me, and I'll never forget his prayer. He said, "Lord, what an incredible privilege You have given to Cecil. You've given him a year, just a fill year to get to know You intimately. What a privilege, Lord!" At that moment, it hit me hard, and I realized that the King of kings, the Lord of lords wanted me to get to know Him better. And instead of welcoming it, I had this bad attitude. Paul says, "To get to know Him." At the end of his journey, he is still saying: I want to know Him even more.

#### **2. To be found in Him**

I remember reading something about this in a book, the name of which I cannot remember. The writer said, "Just imagine that this is you (pointing to a paper) and (lifting the Bible) this is Jesus. Putting the paper into the Bible, he said, "Now you're in Jesus. This is what being in Him is. Wherever Jesus is, however Jesus responds, whatever Jesus would do, you do. That's what it means to be in Him."

Paul reminds us in Romans 6, when he pre-empted this whole notion about God's grace to us: So should we continue to sin that grace may abound? No! You cannot even think like that. Have you forgotten your baptism? In baptism you are in Christ, you died with Christ, you were buried with

Christ, and you rose with Christ, to live a new life. That's what it means to be in Christ, to have the same attitude that Paul is talking about. To respond, react in the way that Christ would react or respond, in every situation in our lives. "What Would Jesus Do?" is a famous car bumper sticker. But it has a profound truth because that's what we need to always ask in every situation. In this situation that I am facing, whether it's a business deal or how to respond to a colleague – how and what would Jesus do?

### **3. To want a righteousness that comes from God through faith.**

The righteousness that we have Jesus said, is like filthy rags, like whitewashed sepulchres, beautiful on the outside and empty and rotting on the inside. Yet, why is it that we can come before His throne room of grace and mercy when the Old Testament people couldn't? Because the veil was torn in two and we now have access. How do we have access? Because we accept what Jesus has done for us; the imputed righteousness of the Savior rests upon us, and we are able to have that access. And so we need to live this life of faith in the righteousness of God. Everything I do, I operate in holiness, in righteousness. Be ye perfect as I am perfect, God said.

### **4. To know the power of His resurrection.**

Why do you think that Paul wanted to know the power of His resurrection? More and more of that power, because the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is in your heart and in mine. The same power! The Greek word is *dunamis*, from which we get our English word dynamite. Dynamite power is in your heart and in mine. Paul says that's the kind of power I want to know more and more so that I can use it more and more to overcome the things that I am facing. Very often we look at this kind of power and we think that it is only used at the time when we are confronted by the demonic. And that is true! we use that power, but that power is with us, in each one of us, to confront behaviors, to confront addictions, to confront sins, to confront lies – that power is yours and mine. And Paul is saying that's what I want you to know more and more of.

Beloved, as you look at your own lives, are you living in the power or have you capitulated to the lies of the evil one? are you living an average substandard life, a mediocre life that Satan has got you down on because something has got a hold of you, but you haven't applied the power of God in that area? I want to experience the power of His resurrection.

### **5. To know the fellowship of His suffering.**

To join Him in His suffering. Goodness! You need to be very careful when you ask for these things, very bold in fact, to be able to ask to experience the suffering that Jesus went through. Paul is saying: I want to know how You went through all that You went through. I want to know it so closely that it seems like fellowship to me. What Jesus did go through while He lived here on earth? He went through ridicule, He went through agony, He went through the loss of a friend. Can you imagine being told one day that a dear friend of yours was beheaded? Jesus went through that kind of grief, faced betrayal and denial and injustice, and even being abandoned. Suffered through it.

And Paul is saying: I want to know so that when I go through, I'll know how to navigate through. I say this as gently as I can – the most redundant, irrelevant question when we are going through a difficult time is to ask – Why? It has no answers, and yet that's the question we ask. Why? Why me, Lord? Why is this happening? We can never understand why it is happening because we are finite in our understanding. We don't have the big picture. One day we will know. The actual question to ask in the midst of suffering is: How? How do I navigate through this? How do I lead through this? How do I walk through this? How should my behavior be through this?

### **6. To be conformed to His death.**

Paul says that he wants to be almost vicariously joined in Christ's death. You wonder why he would want that? Paul is nearing the end of his life, and he knew that. And he is saying: How did You die, Lord? I want to die like that. I want to be conformed to You. How did Jesus die? He died surrounded by His own love for people. That's what emanated from Him. For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross. His love for people took everything. In those dying moments, He had forgiveness. Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. They don't know it, Father, forgive them. Grace – today you shall be with Me in paradise. In those dying moments, in every breath in agony, grace came out of Him.

### **7. To attain the resurrection from the dead.**

Paul says that he wants to be there when that trumpet sounds. What about you, beloved? Will you be there when that trumpet sounds? Will you be there to look into the beautiful glorious face of our beloved Savior? Will you be there to turn and see loved ones who have gone ahead? Will you be there to sit down with Peter and Jonah and Moses and all of those saints who went through so much, and talk to them? Have we made sure that when that curtain comes down, that we are there? Paul says: That's what is important! Everything else is complete rubbish. This, wanting to know Jesus in the dying fading moments of my life, is the most important thing.

That's on our hearts as well. We're here going through forty days of spiritual renewal saying, "How do I draw closer to You, Lord Jesus? What part of me is not sitting well? what part of me needs a realignment? What part of me needs to change? How do I grow in love for You?"

Paul says that there are three things that he will do to continue to get there:

- Forgetting what lies behind,
- Reaching forward to what lies ahead,
- Pressing on.

So often the past is what comes and cripples us, because Satan has a number on the past. He is always there to come and say: You are trying to be a disciple? Don't you remember what you did? And instead of saying "My past is forgiven," we suddenly say, "Yes, that was a terrible thing." And Satan reiterates it. and before we know it, we've abandoned what God wants and we settle down. Satan can't do anything about our salvation, but what he can mess with is the call that God has on our life post-salvation. He can keep us as completely inept Christians who are not fulfilling the call that God has on each of us.

Paul says: Even now I don't want to remember the past. What was in his past? Persecuting the Christians, stoning them. He was there when Stephen was stoned. They kept their cloaks at his feet. Paul wants to forget all that. Isaiah would say to each one of us, "Do not call to mind the former things or ponder things of the past. Behold, I will do something new. Now it will spring forth. Will you not be aware of it? I will even make a roadway in the wilderness, rivers in the desert." In the wilderness where you think nothing can happen, He will make a roadway. Paul is saying that's what he needs to forget. What do you need to forget today, beloved, that keeps coming up as if it's on a loop? That you need to say: Stop! You have no more hold over me.

Then he says: I reach forward. The bible says that God will tell us this is the way, walk ye in it. he will tell us. He will lead us.

Then he says: I will press on. It's not enough to forget, not enough to see what lies ahead, but I will press on. The word 'will' is an act of volition. It's an act of the will. Whatever happens, I will press on. We are about 14-15 days into Lent, and like New Year's eve, we start Lent always saying this is what I'm going to do. I'm going to give up this, going to spend time in this area, I'm going to read the bible,

listen to podcasts, and so on. And then, 14 days on and suddenly we're not doing all that we said we would do because we are not pressing in. Maybe today, some of us need to say: I will press in.

To know Jesus beloved, to get to know our beautiful Savior who gave His life for us. That's why God has left us here, given us His Holy Spirit and said: Move, get sanctified, get cleaned up. I want to do this work in you, but get to know My Son. That's the call for us today. Are we doing what it takes to get to know Jesus? And if we're not, then I think God's Spirit is knocking on our heart's door and saying, "It's time to do that!" That's the commitment that you made; now press in.

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