

The Surpassing Value Of Jesus

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Preacher: Chris Trousdale

[0:00] If you have your own copy of the Scriptures, and I would like you to turn to the book of Philippians.

Philippians chapter 3 this morning. If you're using one of the pew Bibles that are scattered around in the chairs, just turn to page 981 in your pew Bibles and you'll find yourself right there at Philippians chapter 3.

We're finishing our sermon series this morning on the spiritual disciplines. We've been considering those throughout the months of June and July. Next month we're going to return to our series on Romans where we've spent about two years and we're going to try as best we can to finish out Romans before the year is done.

I don't make any ironclad promises on that, but we're going to try to finish Romans before the year is done. But this morning we want to finish this series that we've been in on the spiritual disciplines.

Nate, I told Nate this morning, I said, you're going to love my sermon. I just told him this a few minutes ago. You're going to love my sermon. He said, what's it on? I said, it's about Jesus this morning. He just rolled his eyes. But what he didn't realize is that was the truth.

[1:11] We're going to look this morning at Jesus because we have defined the spiritual disciplines as the means of grace that God uses to cause us to trust and treasure Christ more often.

And so I want us to look at why Christ is of such surpassing worth and value. Why ought we to treasure him? What exactly are we treasuring when we say that we treasure Christ?

And so I want you to direct your gaze there at Philippians chapter 3. We're going to simply read two verses in the middle of a very important and powerful paragraph. But we're going to focus in on two verses in the middle of verses 7 and 8.

And I'd like you to stand as we read God's word this morning. The Apostle Paul writes, But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ.

[2:16] Father, help us to see and understand what it means to gain Christ this morning. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

You guys take a seat. You know, Jesus told a lot of parables during his earthly ministries. During his earthly ministry. He told a lot of lengthy parables at times. He would have several characters and examples and things that pointed to various things.

But some of his parables and some of the most powerful parables that he tells are the really, really short parables. And before we even jump into Philippians chapter 3 this morning, I want to direct your attention to one of the shortest parables that Jesus told in the Gospels.

Turn back to Matthew. Turn to the Gospel of Matthew chapter 13. If you're in the Pew Bibles, it's page 819. Where Jesus, in really one verse, gives us a powerful lesson on the kingdom of God.

He says in Matthew 13, 44, The kingdom of God is like treasure hidden in a field which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

[3:28] The kingdom of heaven for Jesus stands for the reality of being in God's presence. It is the manifest presence of God.

Partially now in this life since Christ has come and he has inaugurated the kingdom of God, we've said that there's this already but not yet aspect to the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is actually here among us.

But we all know, we look at the world around us or we just look at ourselves and we know the kingdom of God is not here in its entirety. So there's a kind of, it's not yet fully here.

But we know that it's present and when we think of the kingdom of God, we ought to think primarily of the presence of God. This is where God's reign is manifested, where his goodness and grace is shown.

And Jesus says that that kingdom, that is the presence of God, the goodness of God, the experience of God's grace and mercy and of himself is of such value that it's like a treasure hidden in a field.

[4:29] And if a man sees that treasure, he will sell everything he has just for the sake of buying the field so that he might have the treasure. Now that sounds like a ridiculous story on its surface.

Can you imagine if you had a neighbor and he put up a for sale sign in his yard and he had a garage sale and he didn't just sell his old stuff, but he had his television out there.

He had all of his clothes, I mean everything except the clothes that he was wearing. He had all of his clothes out in the garage. He's selling everything that he has. And anybody who comes by who wants to offer him, he says, yeah, you can have the lawnmower, you can have whatever you want, you can take.

You would think that your neighbor had lost his mind. And Jesus says, though, that that's exactly what this man would do if he knew the value of what lay in the field.

He would do whatever was necessary to gain access to that treasure. He would get rid of everything that he has. He would lose everything to gain this one thing.

[5:34] The presence of God. The experience of God's goodness and grace and mercy over him and in him and flowing through him. It's of infinite worth and infinite value.

And so this morning I want us to ask a very simple question. What are we willing to lose in order to gain that which is of infinite value?

But in order to answer that question, we have to understand what we mean when we say that the kingdom of God or the presence of God, or to be more specific, Christ himself is of infinite, or in Paul's words, of surpassing value.

What does that mean? And the answer to that question, though, is reflected in the things that you're willing to give up. More valuable than everything, according to Jesus' parable.

And so, according to Paul, also more valuable than everything. Let's take a look here in Philippians chapter 3. And I want you to notice the language that Paul uses. It's similar to the language of the parable that Jesus told because this is the language of the banking industry.

[6:38] This is the language of selling, of trading, of giving up and gaining. This is the language of profit and loss. That's exactly the language that Jesus uses here. It would have been very common in the business world of his day, the words that he uses.

So he says in verse 7, notice the language, whatever gain, you could translate that, whatever profit. Whatever profit I had, whatever good stuff I had, whatever was good for me, whatever gain that I had, I counted as a loss.

Writing it down, red in the ledger, it's a loss. It's gone. I've counted it now. It was a profit, it was a gain, but now it's counted, it's reckoned by me to be like a loss as I total up the value of my life.

It's a loss. Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss. Why? For the sake of Christ. Then he goes on, Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

Notice the language again. It's gain and it's loss. Again, we see the language. In order that I may gain Christ, he says near the end of verse 8. So it's a matter of calculating.

[7:52] It's a matter of figuring. It's a matter of comparing. He's saying everything in my life that I had or that I have now, compared to the value of Jesus, compared to knowing him, compared to being in his presence, it's all counted as loss.

And you would think, but if you're not giving up a lot, of how much value is the gain, right? If you don't have much to lose, then that might reflect that the thing that you're gaining is not worth a whole lot.

But if we just consider Paul as the example, since he's citing his own life here in this passage, if we just consider what Paul gave up, we can have a glimpse into the value of Jesus for Paul, we can have some idea, some inkling of an understanding of just how valuable Christ is.

So I want us to look at what it is that Paul is counting as a loss. What's the gain? What's the profit in his life that now, as he looks at it compared to Jesus, practically it's a loss compared to him.

He's willing to sell it. He's willing to get rid of all of it. What exactly is it? Let your eyes just glance up a few verses, all right? And look at verse 4. He says, Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also, if anyone else thinks he has a reason for confidence in the flesh, I want you to read that phrase as gain, profit.

[9:18] That's what he's talking about. His confidence in the flesh is his gain. It is his profit. And if anyone thinks that he has a reason for that, if anyone thinks he has gain in his life, he says, I have far more so.

Now he gives the list. Circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the law of Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

Now that may seem like a list to you that doesn't connect in your mind. You go, I don't even understand what some of these things are and what their significance happens to be. So I can't calculate how much Paul is giving up because I don't understand him.

I think we can easily categorize these things in three different ways. One of those is that Paul was saying that his entire identity, he's willing to sacrifice upon the altar of just being able to know Christ.

His entire identity, who he sees himself as and who the rest of his society sees himself to be. He is. He identifies himself. He's of the people of Israel.

[10:24] That's foundational for the Apostle Paul. There's nothing in his life prior to coming to Christ that's more important than the fact that he himself is an Israelite. That's who he is. But even more so, he's able to be more specific.

He can say, I'm from the tribe of Benjamin. That's who I identify with. I'm not just generically Jewish. I know my Jewish roots.

I can trace them back to the tribe of Benjamin, that great tribe from whom the first king of Israel came. He can say, I've got pedigree. That's who I am. So much so that he describes it as being a Hebrew of Hebrews.

In other words, he's more Jewish than some of the other Jewish people that he knows. This is his pride. This is his identity. This is who he is. You know, it's surprising that we don't know more about the Apostle Paul's background in life than we do.

You would think that since he's written, you know, 13 out of 27 books in the New Testament, you would think that we would know more about the Apostle Paul. Over half of the book of Acts is really devoted to following the Apostle Paul on his missionary journeys.

[11:31] But when it comes to actual concrete information about his life before coming to Christ, about who he was when he grew up, about his childhood, we know surprisingly little.

We don't know a whole lot. But we do know that his entire upbringing was centered upon his life as an Israelite.

That's who he was. When he talks about his own background in the book of Acts, he talks about the fact that though he was born in the city of Tarsus, though he was born there, that's not where he grew up.

He grew up in Jerusalem. He grew up being trained at the feet of Gamaliel, one of the greatest teachers of his day. Gamaliel, the famous Pharisaical teacher, the famous rabbi of Paul's day.

Paul trained under him. It would be like saying, not only am I trained in this profession, but I've got a PhD in this. He's well trained. His entire identity is wrapped up in the fact that he is Jewish, and he is a Jew among Jews, a Hebrew among Hebrews.

[12:37] And Paul says, though that has defined me my entire life, connects me with my family, with my heritage, everything. He says, I count it all as a loss.

There are very few of us who find all of our identity in our ancestry, or in our ethnic background. But for Paul, that was everything.

And he says, I'm willing to count that as a loss. I'm willing to give up my identity, if necessary, for the sake of knowing Christ.

But not only his identity, because bound up in that is, of course, his profession. His entire livelihood is tied up in that, because he was indeed trained at the feet of Gamaliel.

He himself became a Pharisee. He says he was such a good Pharisee, that he had such zeal for his occupation, and what he believed at the time was his calling, that he tried to destroy God's church.

[13:43] He said he was a persecutor of the church. As to the law, a Pharisee, that's who he was. That's his occupation. That's what he did. As to zeal, how did he perform that task?

He persecuted the church. He had Christians put to death. We see him standing in the book of Acts, watching as Stephen, one of the first deacons, is stoned to death because of his faith.

And there Paul stands, overseeing the events, Stephen's clothes laid at the feet of Paul, almost like a trophy to say, here you are. What you wanted to happen has happened.

That's what Paul does. All of his training was aimed at that. Paul would have gone to be trained at the feet of Gamaliel as a young boy. It's no wonder that he was raised in Jerusalem, that he grew up in Jerusalem, because from the time that he was a child all the way to adulthood, all of his life was focused upon his career, his occupation.

He was being outfitted and trained for this. And not only did he consider it a loss, he had to really give that up when he came to faith in Christ.

[14:50] All of it, gone. He's no longer a Pharisee. He no longer has that sort of occupation. You might think, well, he just traded it in for a very similar one, because he used to be a teacher of the law, now he's a teacher of the gospel, and so he's really just traded it out.

No, that's not what's happened. He's no livelihood now. You ever wonder why Paul is a tent maker? Why does Paul have to have a, why is he bivocational? He wouldn't have been bivocational as a Pharisee, most likely.

Not with the training that he had. Not with the expertise that he had. No. He's given all of that up for the sake of knowing Christ.

You can't really separate his vocational calling from his identity as an Israelite. But you also cannot separate out the third aspect of what Paul counts as a loss, and that is his sense of eternal security or of his way of salvation.

You notice what he says here, how he describes his thinking in this area. He describes himself as, as to the righteousness under the law, blameless, he says.

[16:05] Blameless as to the righteousness under the law. In other words, as a Pharisee, he was an expert in the law, but he also lived his life in accord with the principles that the Pharisees taught.

He followed all the rules. He did everything that he was supposed to do. And so prior to coming to recognize just how fallen he was and coming to understand what Christ had come to do, Paul viewed himself as having his eternity secure.

It's stable. He feels good about himself. He is, as to the righteousness under the law, he's blameless. In fact, the reason to mention the fact that he was circumcised on the eighth day is for Paul to say that literally from infancy he has been following the law.

He was circumcised exactly when the law says he's supposed to be. And so he has lived a lifetime of obedience to the law. You can almost hear the echo of the rich young ruler that we talked about a couple of weeks ago.

I've done all that. I've obeyed all of the commandments. That's Paul and that's his sense of security not just in this life but in the next as well. And Paul says, it's a loss.

[17:17] I give up all of that. I give up my heritage, my background, my identity, my vocation. I give up all of my religious convictions and my standing before others.

I give it all, all up. Every bit of it. For the sake of gaining Christ. And those aren't foreign concerns.

We ought to be able to relate to those because we are called to count the very same kinds of things as a loss. We are called to the same sorts of things.

We are called also to consider that our background or our family connections that we, if necessary, must count them as a loss for Christ necessary.

In fact, hold your place there in Philippians. I want you to turn back to the gospel of Luke so that you can hear what Jesus has to say. I imagine that when, when Paul began to follow Christ, not just his identity as a Jew and as a Hebrew was affected, but his entire relationship with his family severed and shattered because his whole family would have identified in that way.

[18:31] Listen to what Jesus has to say about this. Luke chapter 14, verse 26. If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

And we trip over the language of hate used here, but it's language to help us to understand that compared to Christ, how ought we to value all of these good things in our lives?

Paul never counts it as a bad thing that he is a Hebrew of Hebrews. He never counts it as a bad thing that he's from the tribe of Benjamin. He never counts those things as bad. He just counts them as loss compared to knowing Christ.

And Jesus says, you must do the same. We must all consider the great blessings that we have in our lives, even our own families, our mothers, our fathers, our children, our spouses, all of those things.

We must count even our own life as a loss compared to Christ. What we feel for those things will appear to be even hatred itself though we love them.

[19:48] Paul's loss loss is not something that we can say that's great for him but I don't have to do that. We relate to this.

We ought to relate to this. Scripture says, count it as a loss. The most precious relationships that you have compared to knowing Jesus, loss.

They're loss. And they are precious relationships, aren't they? Parents love their children in ways that are indescribable. We love our spouses in ways that are difficult to even explain to people and yet compared to how we ought to love Jesus and treasure Christ and seek after him comparatively, a gain, a profit becomes a loss.

We can relate to that. We can relate to Paul's sense of losing his vocation. Not in that we all have to quit our jobs because we come to faith in Christ.

Sometimes that's the case. You might have a job that prevents you from serving God. You might have a job that actually requires you to do things that are in violation of God's will and God's ways.

[21:01] And so there are times when people come to Christ and because of that they have to give up their vocation. But even if you don't have to do that, the way that you work and the reason that you work is transformed. So that most of the time we work because we know we're going to get a paycheck.

We work for the paycheck. That's the reason. That's the fundamental reason that we work. If you do a good job and you work hard, it's probably because you want to advance in your company so that you can get a better salary, get better hours, get better benefits, and all those sorts of things.

That's the motivation for our work. But when you come to Christ, that's a loss. A new motive is put in place.

Hold your place in Philippians and just turn over a couple of pages to the book of Colossians chapter 3. Colossians chapter 3 verse 23, Paul tells us, whatever you do, work heartily as for the Lord and not for men.

Knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward, you are serving the Lord Christ. Makes all the difference in the world whether you approach your vocation as something that you do in order to receive a paycheck, in order to advance in the company, or something that you do in order to serve Christ.

[22:24] It makes all the difference in the world. It will not initially look any different. The man who has great ambition to rise to the highest level that he can in his office or in his corporation will work in much the same way as the man who wakes up every morning and says, I'm doing this job for Christ.

I work hard because I want to bring him honor and glory. I will do the things that my boss tells me to do. I will fulfill my assignments as if Jesus himself has given me these assignments because I ultimately work for him, not for the company.

Initially, you just see two people who work really hard, who are valuable employees of the company. But there will come a time when motive is tested because there will inevitably come a time when advancement, gain, will require you to do something or take on a schedule that tears you away from Christ.

and if your hard work is all aimed at that gain, you'll take that gain. You have to work in such a way that you can only come to church once every five weeks.

You'll take that gain. It means a promotion, right? But if all along the aim was to gain Christ so that he would be honored and he would be seen as the supreme treasure, I will work hard because it's working for Christ.

[24:05] You wouldn't dare do that. It was never your aim simply to make more money or to be promoted within the company. Those are just fringe benefits. You were always trying to honor and glorify Christ.

And when someone comes along with something that will give you this but you will not be able to do this one thing that you've aimed at, you will not be tempted to take it. He is of infinitely more value than whatever they offer you.

So this is practical. We can in some ways relate to what the Apostle Paul says, I've counted as loss. And he counts it all as loss because Christ is worth it.

Because he says of the surpassing value of knowing Christ. Christ. What exactly is that value? What is the trade-off?

There are trade-offs. What is the trade-off? What do we gain when we make Christ central? When he becomes more important than all of these other good things in our lives?

[25:14] What do we gain? Well, Paul goes on to describe the gain. He shows us what the profit is. But I think we can by focusing on the wrong aspects of the prophet.

I think we can very, very easily misunderstand the ultimate goal of these things. Take a look at what he says. He goes on as we move past the verses that we read in verse 8.

He goes on to describe the gain in verse 9. He says, It is being found in Christ, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith, so that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share in his sufferings becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

So the first thing that you can see very clearly in that passage is that when you trust in Christ, you gain a right standing before God. When Christ becomes your treasure, you gain eternal life, right?

He says you receive a righteousness that is not your own. What you desperately need is righteousness. What you do not have is righteousness. And so you need it and Paul says, trust in Christ and his righteousness is accounted as yours.

[26:32] It's not your own. It's a righteousness that comes from God as a gift through faith. And so we would say, well, one of the gains that comes with trusting and treasuring Jesus is that we get his righteousness counted as ours.

And that's a precious reality. That is a precious truth. If you have not trusted in Jesus, you must trust in him because you cannot be right with God in any other way. You cannot.

There is no hope for you apart from trusting in him. You must have the righteousness that comes from God that is counted as yours. You must have that where you have no hope.

And that's gain. That's profit for us when we trust and treasure Jesus. He also mentions the resurrection from the dead. Twice he mentions the resurrection because he wants to emphasize the reality that we gain eternal life.

We get to live forever and not just as these bodiless spirits floating around in the clouds. We get to live forever in real glorified bodies. Bodies that do not grow old.

[27:39] Bodies that do not get sick. Bodies that do not grow feeble. We get to live forever in new better bodies with greater capacities and greater abilities to enjoy God.

We get to have those resurrection bodies and we get to live forever on the new heavens and new earth with Christ. That's a gain.

Eternal life. That's a gain. A couple days ago I was up in the game room and Nate and Eli were in the game room with me and I was picking up a bunch of cards because for whatever reason Piper decided to take virtually every flash card which is a lot of flash cards that we have in the house and some cards from their games and I don't know what she was doing it looked like maybe she had just done this with them because I mean tons of them just scattered everywhere and so I'm having a fun dad time picking them up and categorizing them and they were in the room and they had some sort of conversation going on but I didn't catch the very beginning of it and Eli is describing he says in his new house someday he's telling about all these musical instruments that he's going to have I mean he's going to have all these drums and guitars I mean he's going to have everything he's going to have it all in his new house and Nate says how many electric guitars are you going to have he goes I'm going to have five of them like that like he's pointing at the wall like he's going to have them on the wall

I'm going to have five of them that's how many he's going to have and Nate older brother says how are you going to afford how are you going to afford five electric guitars to which Eli says it's the new earth man like you don't get it this is not a new house I'm on the new earth man and Nate just goes oh like I guess you win right I mean eternal life new body new earth that's all good that's good I don't know if you get a house with guitars and drums but you get something that's really really good and that's a gain and so I think that we could be tempted to think that the gain of knowing Christ is righteousness that leads to eternal life and that's it but it's so much more than that I say that because there's a third thing that he mentions as gain that helps us to see that the goal is not righteousness or eternal life it's not the goal because he says something in the middle that you cannot take to be the goal can't be notice take a look closely at what he says he speaks of not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law but that which comes through faith in Christ the righteousness is from God that depends on faith and then that I may know him and the power of his resurrection now notice and mark this down and that I may share in his sufferings becoming like him in his death that by any means possible

I may attain the resurrection of the dead there's a third gain that Paul counts here I get righteousness by faith I get resurrection power and I get to live forever and I get to share in his sufferings become like him in his death you see how when you throw that third thing on there when you share in his sufferings oh I see I get three things I get three things for trusting in Jesus righteousness resurrection life and I get to suffer right and those are the goals those cannot be the goals nobody says suffering's the goal you know it's a path to something else you're headed somewhere else and all three of these things that are a gain are aiming at they are a path towards a greater gain Jesus Christ himself we need righteousness credited to us so that we can stand in his presence because apart from it we are like Isaiah woe is me

[31:41] I am undone he says because I am a sinful man we're the same we cannot survive in his presence unless we have a righteousness that covers us and protects us from our own sinfulness we cannot survive we need a resurrection because these bodies are going to grow old they're going to decay they're going to die and even if you don't live old enough to grow old that's because you die they're going to they're going to give up on you they're not going to last forever and if you're going to enjoy Jesus forever you need to be able to live forever forever have you ever thought about how boring eternal life could possibly be right how boring it could be just to go on and on and on and on one of the reasons that we don't get bored in our daily lives is because we have calendars and we mark days and we you know we finish with this and we move on to that and that sort of carries us from one day to the next and one week to the next and one year to the next that's part of the reason that we don't get bored when we have nothing to do what do we say

I'm bored just bored and you think how can how can eternity not be boring well if the goal is just to get there boring but the goal is to get there so that you can experience ever increasing joy in the presence of Jesus you can never grow bored you can never grow tired or weary with that because it is ever increasing enjoyment the goodness gets better every moment and every day forever there's no limit Christ is infinitely valuable therefore there is infinite goodness to experience in his presence and you never exhaust the treasury that is Jesus himself everything that we do in the Christian life ought to aim at helping us to treasure him more so that whatever gain you have it's easy to count it a loss because something infinitely better awaits me when I count that as loss we've spent these last several weeks looking at these spiritual disciplines not because

I think that we ought to be a church that's really disciplined not because I think we ought to be people who sort of walk in a straight line and do all the right things no even in our definition of what a spiritual discipline is I've been trying to help you I've been trying to aim you and point you towards treasuring Jesus the means of grace that God uses to cause us to trust and treasure Jesus more and all of them aim at that one thing they are all means they are all a way to get to a goal and the goal is to treasure Jesus more tomorrow than I do today so that we open God's word and we read it and we meditate on it because in it we encounter God's voice we hear the very word of God he speaks here this is his word we pray to him because we want to be in relationship we want to respond to what he speaks to us here we want to have an intimate kind of fellowship with him we fast because we don't read enough and we don't pray enough and we get distracted so we fast so that we may focus we pursue stewardship so that we never value our things over him we crave fellowship with one another and membership in the church so that we are around others who will hold us up and point us in the direction where we need to go all of these spiritual disciplines are simply the pathway to experience greater pleasure in Christ all of them and put in place they become the means by which you defeat sin and temptation and you treasure

Jesus more he may through these spiritual disciplines he may call you to count a lot of things as loss all things Paul says but you may have to practically like Paul had to you may have to practically cut some of those losses and that's hard to do if you've not been training yourself to treasure Jesus what would you sell what would you count as loss for the sake of gaining the treasure that is Christ and what things do you find now if you're fully honest with yourself that you would say be hard would be really hard to count that as a loss it would be really difficult God called me to do that if God said that I had to do that it would be really really really hard that's what spiritual disciplines are for to make the counting as loss easier because we perceive and see how great the gain is let's pray you!