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SERIES: GROWING AND GOING

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TITLE: The Source of Our Hope and Joy Pt. 2

If anyone knew the rigors of religion – it was the Apostle Paul. He tells us about it in Philippians 3, starting at verse 4 (NASB):

4 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:

So, he's saying, "if you think you're the most religious person – the best of the best as far as works go – *I can top it.*" Paul then backs it up with a brief, but powerful biography and testimony to make his case. Verse 5 & 6:

5 circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee;⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

Then Paul changes his focus from lineage to that of his works. Here too, he is unmatched. In Paul's day, Pharisee wasn't a bad term. Today we talk about Pharisees as though they were bad, but back then, a Pharisee was the highest form of Judaism. He was the cream of the crop, in terms of being a religious Jew. Should salvation come by works, the Pharisee should've been considered first. Pharisees were the religious elite, who were committed to the Scriptures and following the Law. But here's the problem: it was motivated by the head and not the heart. Paul had a checklist to live by, and he did it to the "T".

He then continues in saying, he had such a commitment to his religion that he would passionately attack those who would oppose it, namely Christians. You see, most Pharisees would *talk* about the problem. Paul didn't just talk; he did something about it. Paul would never forget his persecution of the church. But by God's grace, he would be forgiven. Last, Paul says "as to the righteousness, which is in the Law, found blameless". Does he mean sinless? Is Paul claiming to be perfect? Absolutely not. He confirms his own sin in **Romans 7:7** "**...I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET."** You see, Paul was very good at doing the law outwardly, but one thing was for sure - the inward sins he could not deny.

So, in summary, Paul does some accounting work. He has told the Philippians, look if my lineage and my actions were that of a checking account, I'm so far in the black, nothing could bankrupt me. But then something remarkable happens. Philippians 3, Verse 7:

⁷ But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

Something amazing happened to Paul. On his way to Damascus, he encountered a risen Jesus. Immediately things changed. Acts 9 records Paul's conversion. It says Paul was blind for three days. It says that Ananias laid his hands on Paul and something like scales fell from his eyes, and he could see again. What he would see was his checking account of works and heritage went from black to red. In an instant, he realized he was blind to the reality of his works. He was spiritually bankrupt. He knew the only way to remedy this negative account was Jesus Christ.

We find two dangers here – Our Present & Our Past:

Paul says, "whatever things were gain to me." Paul counted his works as things that kept him from Christ and God. I think we all struggle with legalism at times. Grace is an amazing thing. It is outrageous. God freely forgives us for our sins. **Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."** That's the deal. It's not about what we can do. It's all about Him. I think if we're honest, in our entertainment-soaked culture, we often put the things of the present above Christ. We don't really want to give up our things for the sake of Christ. We value our TV shows, our video games, our sports, our kids, our lawns, our house projects, our cars, our toys; our things get put before Christ. The things of the present pull us away from God. Would you give up all these for Christ? Am I willing to give up things for Christ? This is a question I have to ask myself daily. What is it in your life that is too precious for you to give up for the sake of Christ? We all have that thing or many things. What is yours?

But we also have our past. Paul has just pointed to his past, both the good, and - now that he realizes it – the bad. I have found more Christians who sideline themselves because of their past. They truly recognize their Salvation and the grace that God has shown them. They see it and they embrace it. But Satan brings up their past, whether it's their alcoholism, their sexual escapades, their poor parenting, their money mismanagement, their immature decisions of high school. Whatever it is, they let their past sideline them, and it hinders their progression in their faith.

So there's the danger of our past, and there's also the danger of the present. But we can make the trade.

Paul helps us see why this trade is so worth it in verses 8-11.

⁸ More than that, I count all things to be loss 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,

Paul says in verse 7, yes, my credits are now debits because of Christ; even more so I consider all earthly things as a big fat loss or negative balance when I think of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord. Paul is not talking about a one-time event of encountering Jesus. He is talking about really knowing Him. This is an ongoing knowing – an active relationship.

DISCUSSION:

N: Let me bring in Cara Whitney and Arnie Cole for a moment. Cara, people get hung up on their past – that’s not a surprise. You came to faith later in life. How were you able to leave behind the past?

C: First of all, I want to point out that Psalms 32 and 51 are David reminding us about how heavy guilt is. I mean, he talks about how he felt it in his bones. So I know what that feels like. My poor choices have hurt me. I live with the consequences of those. Even heavier is knowing that my poor choices have hurt other people in my past as well. So that's tough. So I acknowledge that guilt from our past is just a real heavy thing. But then think about this: Maybe sometimes we just don't feel forgiven. And I think that's a big difference - God is a forgiver, not us. And I realized that by allowing my mind to go to that place where I couldn't forgive myself, it was me really saying that my standard of forgiveness is higher than God's standard. God forgives fully, completely, and unconditionally. He doesn't want anything. He just wants us to admit our faults and move on with Him. So when He forgives you, you're forgiven.

N: You’re exactly right. And I think, if people do struggle with that notion of forgiveness from other people, equating that forgiveness with God, and those two things, you know, you can’t connect the two, because God does truly forgive us wholly. Our sins are as far from the East as they are from the West. And even if people can't let go of the past, we have to remember - in God's eyes, we are forgiven. But as you said, there are still consequences we live in today. And that's not reflective of God's forgiveness -that's just the reality of living in the world today. Arnie, I'd like to talk to you a little bit, because you know, that people get caught both in their past, but also in their present. How do you see people struggling with those today?

A: So I think if you define yourself by your past, it dictates your future. So if you live with a lot of guilt, you become your guilt in the present day. So it's kind of a revolving cycle that is awful and destructive, and stops people from growing spiritually.

N: Yeah, I think all of us, even in this room today, can admit that both the things of our past and even our present can take our eyes off of what really matters, and growing in our faith. And so all of us need to pause and truly reflect in who we are in Christ, and remember what He has done for us, and what He is doing through us. When we do this, we can begin living on purpose and for a purpose.

My friend Ryan and I have a running joke, and it’s in regards to knowing people. Do any of you know a name-dropper? Sure. We all do. It's not uncommon to hear, "Yeah, I know Scott Frost." Or Tom Osborne. Or whoever they want to claim. But after asking a few clarifying questions, they don't really know that person at all. They simply met them, had a picture with them, or received a request for a donation from them. But the reality is, they really don't know them.

You see, here is another danger to your faith: It’s not really knowing Jesus. Not actively, intimately knowing Jesus.

Can you imagine what would happen if I would have dated my wife for two years, prepared a wedding, said our vows, and then said, "It's good to know you. You've changed my life. Now, I'll see you when I see you." And then I go on with my life. You know how ridiculous that sounds. That would not be a good relationship. My knowing her would cease. Or think of it this way: Imagine your best friend. You spend all day in school with this friend. Your evenings and weekends are with that friend. Then one day, your friend disappears. But fast-forward 20 years - He or she shows up 20 years later, and brings someone, and declares to their acquaintance, "I want to introduce you to my best friend." And they point to you! You'd say, "Are you kidding me? You don't even know me anymore!"

Many of us have done this very same thing with Christ. Many of us struggle with knowing Christ. We get saved, have some connection with Jesus through the Bible, in prayer, and experience, but then over time, He gets put on the bottom shelf of relationships. Why? There are lots of reasons we hear about. The number one thing people say that keeps them from reading the Bible is their lack of time. Now, I get that. We are all busy. Even in the world of COVID-19, where life has slowed down, we're still busy. But I remember someone once asked me, "What is your most precious resource?" "Time," I responded. "No," he said. "It's not time. We all have the same 24 hours. Your greatest resource is your attention, your focus. It's not time- it's what we do with that time." So our attention is an issue. Another thing that gets in the way is distraction: Things – both good and bad. Activities. Problems. Ultimately there is a long list of things that can get in the way from knowing Jesus. But when we truly value someone, we will spend time with them and know them more and more.

I actually heard on the radio this week, "You eat what you are hungry for." And this is exactly what Paul is saying in verse 8. He sees knowing God as the highest value. He's hungry to know Him. Nothing is superior to it. He says so much so, that all those other things, he is happy to give them up, because they are like *rubbish*, or as the word means: *excrement*. It is the waste from our bodies. As J. Vernon McGee put it, Paul flushed his religion down the drain.

Philippians 3, Verses 9-11 (NASB):

⁹ 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,

¹⁰ that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; ¹¹ in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Friend, this is such good news. Not just to Paul, but to everyone who believes, because in verses 9-11, Paul provides us with **5 major benefits of knowing Christ and calling him Savior**. The first is in verse 9. Paul says that we become saved – that we become righteous not by anything we can do, but instead totally by the grace of God. **Galatians 2:21 says, "I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness *comes* through the Law, then Christ died needlessly."**

God offers freely salvation by grace. It is unmerited. It is unearned. It is by God's work. Paul got this, and it brought him great joy! I so desire this for you and for me. I want you to rest in God's

grace. You can't earn it, and you can't lose it. **So the first benefit is: Salvation is by God's grace through faith. Rejoice!**

The second benefit of becoming a Christian is that you can know him. It is not like knowing a famous author, political leader, speaker, actor, or whoever might be someone we respect. These people we will likely never know. But the God of the Universe allows us to *know* Him, to know Christ, and to know the Spirit. This is *VIP status* with the one and only true God. We strive to see someone famous, shake their hand at a banquet, but we have God the Father, with His arms wide open for His adopted children.

Third, we receive power, which is the Greek word *dunamis* "doo'-nu-mis". It is the root word for our English word "dynamite". Dynamite packs a punch! Christ did not come to make sick people well. He came to make spiritually dead people live. That is power. That is the power of His resurrection. Powerful events change lives, and the power of Christ's resurrection can change your life too. Paul wrote in **Romans 15:13** "**Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit**". This power produces supernatural joy and hope in all circumstances. I want that. Don't you?

Fourth, Paul says we experience fellowship. But not just in the pleasant things of life. No, Paul experienced joint participation with Christ in His suffering. Think about what Paul experienced. Paul was beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, whipped, jailed, imprisoned, and in time, would be martyred for His faith and love of Christ. He was committed from the onset to suffer and die in fellowship with Christ. This is the kind of stuff you don't hear in the prosperity gospel. But the truth of the matter is when you become a Christian, you count the things of this world as loss – rubbish, excrement. Your life must resemble a battleship and not a cruise ship. Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 16 that to follow Him meant being willing to lose it all, including their life. Paul did it. We must be willing too. You know that the culture is changing rapidly. I'm not a doomsday guy, but I cannot deny that persecution is coming. I pray we are ready to endure it.

Fifth, we receive resurrection and, ultimately, glorification. Death is not the end. Paul shouts at death in the face, when he writes, "**O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?**" ⁵⁶ **The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law;** ⁵⁷ **but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**"(1 Cor. 15:55-57) The Christian does not need to fear death nor any hardship. It is not meaningless and without reward. Our reward is resurrection. Our reward is salvation. Our reward is eternal relationship with the Trinity. Our reward is not temporary. No, it is forever.

Paul did his calculations and found out he gave up things. He gave up works of the flesh, his religion, and found that which is eternal. The now famous missionary and martyr Jim Elliott said this, "*He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.*" I encourage you – today, rest in God's grace. It is sufficient for you. He has paid the price. You are free to rejoice in the Lord. Be joyful not because of what you have or what you do, but because of Christ. Because God has done it all. This is the true source of our hope and joy.

N: Well, I can't think of two more joyful people than my discussion partners Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney. Cara, what does it mean to you to KNOW Christ?

C: Well, when a person truly knows Jesus, it's on the basis of relationship. So you spend time together, you talk regularly. And when you know Jesus, you know God. That's really awesome to think about. So not just knowing *about* Jesus - being a Christian is *knowing Him* personally.

N: Yeah. There's such a difference between that "knowing of" and actually *knowing*, but knowing someone intimately takes a lot of time, and it's a process, and it takes a lot of work daily. How have you pursued knowing Christ, intimately and daily?

C: Just by talking to him, getting to know Him. His Word: It's a love letter to the lost. Just got to pick it up and start reading it, and getting to know the character of God. You know, with all the stuff that's happening right now, you can say, "God is in control" and He truly is. But when you know Him intimately, you know His promises, and then you can dig deeper in that: Well, I know God's promised this, this and this. And there are things that God can't do, and one of them is go back on His promises. So you can look at His promises, and I think it's just a deeper way to dig, instead of just blanketing the whole situation with, "Well, God's in control," and trying to pass it off, because that only works for so long.

N: Right. Yeah. Well, that's a topic I'd love to discuss more in a future episode potentially - is God's abilities, and what He can and cannot do, but that's not the topic of today. We're talking right now about knowing Christ. And Arnie, I want to turn to you now, because we don't always talk about the power of having Christ as your Savior. How have you experienced His power?

A: A couple of different ways. Probably the most exciting way is as a researcher. Early on, when we started studying the power of God's Word, we ran some pretty sophisticated stuff with text analysis and all that, but we actually saw the power of *knowing* Jesus, the power of being saved, come up over and over again, by people having the Holy Spirit in their lives. And that was just a tremendous thing that we saw. And really, you could see a difference between people that weren't saved, or notional Christians, versus people that were on fire for Jesus. And it all had to do with how they listened to the Holy Spirit in their lives. So - and I know you conservative young pastors don't like to talk much about the Holy Spirit, or the power of the Holy Spirit, because you're afraid people are just going to freak out - but it is a tremendous power that I've experienced personally - not in a weird way, but I experience it every day. And that is a power you have, when you become a Christ follower, that gives you a tremendous edge - if you're not too stupid to overlook it.

N: Well, I think that's well said, and actually, you know me far too well, to actually think that I don't want to talk about the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit makes such a huge difference in our lives today. And I think in ways that we don't even think about, or care to acknowledge. And so I think that'd be another great topic to really dig into deeper, but let's talk about our relationship with Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit in our everyday life. Because let's face it - we've got good days and bad days; we've got big trials; huge triumphs; and everything in between. So how does having that relationship with Christ; how does knowing God's promises;

and how does having the Holy Spirit living in us, impact how we approach the good and the bad?

C: Well, everything you just described are changes. So we know that in this world, everything we have can be taken away at any point. Those are major changes sometimes, and little changes that affect us emotionally. Jesus doesn't change, even when our circumstances do, so you can count on Him, even when you don't even know what you're dealing with. Sometimes I've said those prayers - I'd be like, "I don't even know Lord," you know, but He's the same yesterday. He's the same today. And He'll be exactly who He says He is tomorrow. And you can count on Him. He does not change.

N: What do you think Arnie?

A: Yeah, I agree. I mean, that's the one thing in life you can count on - is Jesus Christ and your relationship with Him. So don't mess it up. Don't put other things in front of Him, and listen to what He has to say, because really, He's got a whole lot to say about a whole lot of things in your life.