

I've given today's message the title, "The joy of knowing Christ as Lord"... When I first began to preach, my minister gave me a little hint, "Sum-up the main thrust of the message in 1 sentence." And it's something that I've tried to do for the last 25 years.

But I very nearly missed, a key element of today's reading, and that's why I've put it into the "One-sentence title"... The very first sentence says, "**Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.**" And I think what happened for me, is often we think that words like "**rejoice in the Lord**" / "Hallelujah" / "Amen" (especially with a ?), are clichés, or religious-sounding 'filler' that preachers and worship leaders use, to fill the silence while they're trying to collect their thoughts.

But when he says "**Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.**" (BTW, it's not finally – he's only half-way through the letter) (Typical preacher hey) – Those dastardly preachers, they use the word "finally" and everyone breathes a sigh of relief "Finally, they're going to wrap it up", and 5 points and 20min later, they're still going"...

But when Paul says "**Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.**", he's reminding us that all of what follows, gives us reason to rejoice. And with what does follow, although it's the simple, basic Gospel, the depth of Paul's theology here, means this is no trivial, temporary, circumstantial happiness – it's an eternal **joy**:

- of knowing Christ;
- that overwhelms the circumstances we find ourselves in;
- that has less to do with how I'm feeling, and more to do with my relationship with Jesus.

And so he says,

3 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.

That's a weird statement. He's about to repeat himself, and it's no trouble for him to repeat himself (sure sounds like a preacher)... And it's safe for them, if he does repeat himself.... It's just a weird statement... This is what I think it means:

Is it something he's written to them before? Is it something he's had to write to another church? Is it something that he's warned them about when he was with them in person???

Well, it's probably all three...

At the moment, with Covid 19, I am sick-to-death of the warnings... Most people probably aren't as sick of them as I am, because you can just walk straight past them... I mean, who reads them any more??? But for me, I'm helping to run the pistol club, and for us to be allowed to continue, it is a legal requirement, that although everybody's seen these signs before; although they're everywhere we go,,, I must put out warning signs, (wash your hands, don't touch, keep your social distancing)... And we have to do it for church... And hopefully you've noticed all the signs we've put up about the place (did any of you read them???)

You see, although hardly anybody is reading these signs anymore (some people have never read them), we are

obligated – it is our duty of care, to warn people... And when people don't adhere to social distancing and hand washing rules, that increases the incidences and the severity of outbreaks...

And so, it might be a little bit of trouble for us to put up a few signs (but it's not really any trouble), and it's safe for you – it's not going to hurt you...

But Paul was trying to control an epidemic in the early church... It was an epidemic that threatened to destroy the church – it had at its heart, a completely wrong understanding of the Gospel. And so Paul made it his practice, to often warn churches, to stand against this false teaching...

Sometimes he had to write to a church (or visit a church) that was deeply affected by it – the church in Galatia is a key example. And so, it was a false teaching, that was so common / so rampant, that even a healthy church (such as Philippi), he felt it his duty to warn them...

You know, much of what we read in the Scriptures, some people feel “This isn't relevant for me.” – this isn't an issue that I have trouble with – Why would our preacher be giving a message on this today??? Well, it's because, as disciples of Jesus, as we follow Him, there's going to be stuff that crops-up (all along the way – at various times), that's going to try and divert us from the Gospel... And if we know of these diversions (before we come across them), then we won't be led astray...

Alright, so although this heresy – this false teaching – this ungodly diversion, wasn't affecting the Philippian church (at that time), it was no trouble for Paul to repeat the warning (that he often repeated [to various churches/various times]) And it would help to keep the Philippian church safe...

Righto, so what is this heresy??? And he's pretty harsh/cutting, about how he describes those who are preaching it: ²Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh.

Ohh, sounds like some kind of evil body-cutting cultish behaviour... No, the issue is "circumcision"...

One of the biggest issues the early church had to deal with, was how the Christian church, related to Judaism... You see, Jesus Christ came for the **Jews**. Jesus **is** a Jew. In fact, not just for the Jews – He came for the whole of Israel.

But the promises of God, that were (at one time) just for the people of Israel, **in Christ**, included people of all nations... And I'm pretty sure that most of us here today, are not Jewish. And by the grace of God, isn't this good news, that in Christ, people of every tongue and race, can be saved, and become children of God... That's good news, and that's something to rejoice about, isn't it...

Now, for us today, Circumcision is a medical procedure. A little piece of skin (the foreskin of a male) (which is

sometimes prone to infection) is cut off, to reduce the possibility of infection... But for the Jew, circumcision was the mark (the brand) that distinguished the Jew from the Gentile... It was part of the covenant that God had made with the people of Israel. Right from the time of Abraham, God made a covenant with Abraham, that the Lord our God, would be God to Abraham and his decedents, and that they would be His people,, And the sign of this covenant, was circumcision...

Genesis 17:¹⁰ This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised.

¹¹ You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. ¹² He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring,

Alright, for the Jew, this was very clear – this is the sign of being one of God’s people...

But how did that apply to the Christian church??? Jesus came first to the Jew, but largely, his own people rejected Him... And the Jews persecuted the early church, and so the early Christians had to flee Jerusalem... And everywhere they went, they took the Gospel with them...

And guess what happened – they went into the land of the Gentiles (non-Jew), And when the Gentiles heard the Gospel being preached, many believed, and turned to Jesus,,,,, which created an issue: To belong to the God of the Jew, shouldn't the Gentile have to become a Jew???? And if circumcision was the mark of being a Jew – the mark of belonging to God, shouldn't these Gentile Christians, also be circumcised????

This is something that Paul Himself had to grapple with. As we're going to see shortly, "He was a full-on Jew."

But it's the experience that Peter had, (see series Acts 10&11 - 2015)... But through a miracle of God, Peter was led to go to Caesarea, and he knew that God was telling him to preach to the Gentiles. And so he did. And while he was preaching the Gospel, they heard it, and they believed, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit... And they were given the gifts of the Spirit. Some of them were speaking in other languages / They were praising God... It was a movement of the Holy Spirit...

And from that time on, the lesson was this – What's the brand/mark of being a Christian? Being circumcised? No... Being Baptised? No... It's being filled with the Holy Spirit...

Am I a child of God? – Well, is there evidence of the Holy Spirit in my life??? Does my life look more like I'm living by the flesh? Or more like I'm living by the Holy Spirit???

You see, you can circumcise a monkey (I assume – I don't know the anatomy – probably a bad example)... But anyone can have a surgical circumcision – that doesn't make them God's people. What's the evidence that I'm saved? What's the evidence that I'm a child of God??? – it's to be filled with the Holy Spirit... And it's the same for baptism – anyone can go and get dunked under the water and be baptised...

However, in the New Testament church, there's a group known as "the Judaizers"... And they were adamant, that if you want to become a Christian – if you want to be one of God's people, it was necessary for you to become a Jew, and therefore you had to be circumcised...

And these people would travel throughout the land, and turn up at a church that Paul had established, and say, "It's good to see that you're following Jesus, but do you realise that you're missing something???" "Believing, isn't enough; Being Baptised isn't enough; – You need to be circumcised"...

And I tell you what, Paul wouldn't stand for that... To bring in an extra requirement, and to set up an extra barrier, destroys what the Gospel is – a gracious act of God...

Alright, so that's what's going on here, and that's why Paul is so harsh: He calls them: ² Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. You see, they weren't only mutilating the flesh – they were mutilating the Gospel.

And he says: V³ For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh

You see, even back in the Old Testament, the surgical procedure of circumcision, wasn't the defining thing, of whether a person was in/out / in relationship with God...

It was merely an external sign, of what God wanted in the heart...

Deuteronomy 10:16-20 (ESV)

¹⁶ Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn. ¹⁷ For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. ¹⁸ He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. ¹⁹ Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. ²⁰ You shall fear the LORD your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear.

Alright, this is a matter of the heart – it's pruning away the flesh from the heart... and there in Deuteronomy, he goes on to describe what this means – it means to be a people who are

just like God is just, and **righteous** like God is righteous, and so the specific example given here, is for the widow and the orphan & **sojourner** (travellers / refugees) – basically, people who aren't able to provide for themselves, be fair (don't take advantage of them), and give them food and clothing if they need it...

In Jeremiah 4:4, circumcision of heart, is to admit guilt, repent of sin, and turn back to God.

And now, Paul is saying that it's **not** those who have the surgical operation who are the circumcised – it's those **who** worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh .

The key issue here, isn't about doing good works/not doing good works... And it's not even about keeping religious observances/not keeping religious observances... It's about “when we **rely** on these things” – it's about when we believe that they count in some way (towards getting us saved), or that they're necessary for our salvation...

And he gives a bit of a testimony here...

Before Paul was saved, he was known by his Jewish name “Saul”... **If anyone ... [had] reason for confidence in the flesh** as he puts it, Paul had more...

He was a Jew (through-&-through)

- He had the mark. He was circumcised on the 8th day;
- He had the heritage/lineage – he was of the tribe of Benjamin (out of all of the tribes, Benjamin was one of the more Godly [at times])
- A Hebrew of Hebrews;
- Did he keep the law? Too right he did – he was a pharisee... Now, in the New Testament, the Pharisees get a pretty bad wrap, because they were at loggerheads with Jesus... But the Pharisees were a lay purity movement... They were strict about keeping themselves pure for God... They kept all the requirements of the written law...
- And it wasn't just empty religion for Paul. He was filled with zeal for God. How zealous was he??? He became a persecutor of the church... He heard about these Christians, and he thought they had it wrong, and he hunted them down, and arrested them – he saw it as his duty to arrest them, and oversee their execution... It wasn't just empty religion – he was zealous for God.
- And according to the Law, he was righteous/blameless...

Now, that doesn't mean that he never did anything wrong... But he was blameless by the Law. He lived a good life, and he ticked all the religious boxes... And part of his religious observance, would've included would've included sacrifice & the day of atonement,

where his sins were atoned for...

And so, by the law, he **was** righteous/blameless

Alright, so if anyone had reason to rely on good works / religious observance / zealousness for God (misdirected or not), Paul had reason for that sort of confidence, that he was right with God...

But here comes the kicker: Do you know what, he says:

⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

Alright, some of that would've been a positive for him (well, maybe not arresting Christians & overseeing their execution)....

⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

Let's bring this forwards to today/our culture:

From my experience, when it comes to people who have "a spiritual awareness" but aren't Christians, there's 2 general lines of thought that they take, and sometimes the lines are blurred and co-mingled...

The first line, is the religious line – It's where there's no real heart relationship with Jesus, but they try to maintain connection to religious ceremonies, and they feel that because they're religious (baptised; confirmed; went to a few church services/every week; confession; communion/mass; some

other religion) – they feel that they’ve fulfilled all religious righteousness, and so they’ll be right with God...

That was probably more common in years gone by...

Probably the more common path today, and I meet a lot of people who take this line – It’s those who have no real heart relationship with Jesus, but they feel that by living a good, moral life, that’s what’s required....

Well, Paul ticked both of these boxes, and do you know what it was worth??? Nothing...

⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

Why? What’s so bad about this stuff??? What’s so bad about being a bit religious? What’s so bad about doing good things??? Well, nothing.... Unless that becomes our reason for confidence... (what Paul calls “confidence in the flesh”)... And it becomes a problem, when these things, which might be good in themselves, are what prevent us from embracing the only means of salvation... They’re a problem, when they keep us from responding to God, in the way that He wants us to...

⁸ Indeed, I count **everything** as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

Nothing else matters... What does matter??? Knowing Christ Jesus as Lord...

Do you know Jesus? Do you really know Jesus? And do you know Him as Lord???

In Jeremiah 9, God shows us the difference between knowing Him, and having an ‘uncircumcised heart’...

Jeremiah 9:23-26 (ESV) ²³ Thus says the LORD:
“Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, ²⁴ but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.”

²⁵ “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will punish all those who are circumcised merely in the flesh— ²⁶ Egypt, Judah, Edom, the sons of Ammon, Moab, and all who dwell in the desert who cut the corners of their hair, for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in heart.”

Why? Because they don’t understand God, and they don’t know God... To know God, is to follow God in all of His ways... He practices steadfast love, justice, and

righteousness in the earth. And those who know God, do the same, because it delights Him...

I'm going to say something now, that some of you might find "offensive" or "controversial"...

Some people become so 'militant' on "We're saved by grace & by grace alone", that any suggestion that we should strive to be obedient to God, and that we should strive to live by His precepts, is "Legalism" and as such, is a heresy... And the message gets given, that as Christians, we shouldn't try to be good – God will just make us good...

And I'm going to say quite bluntly, "If that's your view of Jesus and the Gospel, well you don't know Jesus." That's the Christian version of being "uncircumcised in heart". To know God, is to know that He is just and righteous, and to therefore, be just and righteous.

You see, to know Jesus Christ, involves 'us becoming like the one we know'...

And this isn't any nameless God... It's not very politically correct to say that Jesus is the only way to God, but it is true... And that's why we Christians will always be accused of intolerance and we'll be accused of being exclusive, because we say that all other religions are wrong, and we can't just choose what god we want to worship (as if it doesn't matter)... It **does** matter... Christ Jesus, is the only one worth knowing...

And we know Him as Lord... Being a disciple of Jesus, isn't about saying the magic words of a sinners prayer, and telling him that I believe in Him, and then me living my life for myself... It's to know Jesus as our own personal Lord... For Jesus to be Lord, means that He's King – He's Boss – He's the Master... And for Jesus to be **my** Lord, I submit my all to Him... We submit to Christ's Lordship...

- To serve Him;
 - To live for Him;
 - To worship Him...
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- We no longer put ourselves first and Him somewhere down our order of priorities... We put Him first, and our whole lives, are lived in submission to Him...

Now, for some, that might sound like a terrible cost – and it certainly doesn't sound like the Gospel that's preached in many churches... You see, the Gospel that's often preached, isn't the Gospel at all... “Just believe that Jesus died for your sins, and You're saved...”

No, that's a very anaemic version of the Gospel... Paul said: V8.... For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him

What did Paul lose??? Pretty much everything. He was often persecuted... As he wrote this letter, he's in prison for Jesus... He was eventually executed for Jesus...

But even so, it wasn't his own efforts for Jesus; It wasn't his own suffering for Jesus, that earned Him a place in God's good-books...

For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, 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—

You see, before Paul became a disciple of Jesus, he put his very best effort into following/keeping “The Law”... What's this “The Law” that we're talking about? – Theologians call it Mosaic Law (Law given by Moses).

And the Mosaic law included the 10 commandments, but it also had all of the Jewish religious and cleanliness requirements... And whilst, by his very best efforts, Paul could keep a fair bit of the Mosaic Law, he was unable to keep all of the Law, and neither could you or I...

And, as one commentary I read put it, “*On the final day, when he stands before God, he does not want to be found clinging to his inadequate righteousness.*”ⁱ

And that's why Jesus came... Because I have sinned, I deserve to die... But Jesus took that punishment for me, and He died on the cross. And by having faith in Jesus, God acquits me of my sin... He declares me “righteous”...

And so, Paul is **not** clinging on to his own efforts to be good/religious – He now knows, that these things, are not what's going to make Him right with God... What will make Him right with God??? **Knowing** God; Knowing Jesus Christ as Lord; He's *trusting in God's willingness to consider him acquitted because of Christ's deathⁱⁱ* on the cross.

Do you understand what this is saying? Michael Brumpton has been a terrible, terrible human being... When perfect behaviour and perfect attitude toward God, is the only acceptable standard, I fail miserably... Michael Brumpton's righteousness, is pathetic...

In fact, the only one who lived a perfectly sinless life, is Jesus Christ... And so, if I depend on my own righteousness, dit-doww, I score an epic fail... But as with Paul, we count everything else as rubbish, for the **joy of knowing Christ**... And so, by faith, the righteousness of Jesus, becomes ours, but what sort of faith:

- A believing faith;
- Trusting faith;
- Bowing to Jesus as Lord;
- Faith that lives for Jesus;
- Faith that follows Jesus;
- Faith demonstrated by obedience..

By faith, the righteousness of Jesus, becomes ours...

V¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

Ohh, Now, if we're honest, many of us would be inclined to take the 1st half of v10, and not the 2nd half, thank you very much... What a joy, to share in the resurrection of Jesus, but we're not so sure that we want to share in his suffering... Or in His death...

We talked about this a few weeks ago... Remember, Paul said, "For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain..." The pinnacle of our lives, is actually when we die and get to go and be with Jesus...

But to live, is Christ... Because Jesus is Lord... (And an unbeliever probably won't get this), but when we **know** Christ, it is an honour, to suffer for Christ...

And Paul's saying, "I'll suffer, even to death", V¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Every generation of Christians, hope that they'll be the generation who are alive when Jesus returns... We don't know the hour. We don't know the day. But when Jesus comes again, the dead in Christ will be raised to eternal life, and those who are still alive, will be caught up together with Him... But until the day that Jesus returns, and every generation up until now, and maybe for our generation, the only way to achieve the resurrection of the dead, is to die first...

And of course, if we're going to die, if we had our preference, most of us would probably die peacefully in our sleep, but I suspect that Paul's got a pretty fair idea that he's going to be

executed/martyred for following Jesus... And that's OK with Him...

¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Righto, to finish up, I want to come back to the key sentence that we began with:

“The joy of knowing Christ as Lord”

Until we know Christ, we won't understand the joy. And to know Christ, isn't just about knowing about Him. And faith isn't just about believing about Him...

Yes, it's about a deep, personal relationship,, but it's a relationship of trust, and obedience, and even suffering for us... Do you hear what I'm saying? Those weren't empty words, when Paul said “We are the circumcision”... He's talking about having a circumcised heart – a heart yielded to God... A heart, filled with the Holy Spirit.

What a joy... We could talk about this for hours, but I think we'd better stop there.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,
We thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ.
And Lord, we offer you, ourselves today.
For Jesus to be **our** Lord.

Not just in Name, but in reality...
We yield ourselves to you.
We give you our all.

Lord, in so many ways, in the past,
We've put our trust in our own religious acts;
We've put our trust in our own good deeds,
As if we thought that they might save us,
Or at least help our cause...

We now know that that is so wrong.
And the only way to be righteous,
is to receive the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Oh Lord, what a joy it is to know You,
And to Know You as Lord.

Lord, forgive me, for all of my sins.
I thank you, that by faith,
The blood of Jesus, cleanses me from all unrighteousness,
And by faith, I am acquitted of my sins,
And I receive the righteousness of Christ.

And now Lord,
By Your Holy Spirit,
Help me to live in Your righteousness.
As I obediently follow Jesus,
All the days of my life,
No matter what the cost,
That we may attain the resurrection from the dead.

In Jesus' Name,
Amen.

ⁱ Thielman, Frank. *The NIV Application Commentary – Philippians*. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1995

ⁱⁱ Thielman, Frank. *The NIV Application Commentary – Philippians*. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1995