

[re:action]

:: philippians 3.8-11 ::

What is great about the New Testament Epistles is that they are written to not only instruct us, but also to exhort us. Each one is a specific call to action in one way or another. They're not just a philosophical discussion of doctrine. They're not just historical narratives. They're pointed and personal and require a response.

We think of Timothy and the pastoral epistles, which *do* instruct in doctrine but also exhort a specific group in a specific way. We think of John's letters where we're very boldly commanded to walk in light and to love others actively. We think of Corinthians where we're given specific insight and instruction on how we are to behave when the Church comes together.

And here in Philippians, Paul is instructing and exhorting us as well. He's trying to get across this idea that there is something wonderful and supernatural for our lives through Jesus Christ. There's a filling and a purpose and a completion that brings a great sense of peace and satisfaction as we live as disciples.

But what Paul is *also* trying to get across is the fact that the Christian life requires some things. It requires commitment. It requires endurance. It requires a labor and a pressing and a contending on this side of eternity. Very plainly, Paul has laid out the goal that God has in mind for each one of His people: our Lord desires that we be people who are not only useful in His Kingdom, but also people who are contented and full of love and joy.

But this ideal that God has for us cannot happen on its own. It requires action on our part. It requires that we **react** to God and answer the call He has placed on each of our lives to follow Him and to submit ourselves under Him.

It requires that we set aside other pursuits that we might pursue Him. We must lay aside other burdens and cargos that we might take up a cross and a Church on our shoulders. **This** is the Christian life as far as Paul is concerned. And, while we all are interested in the *blessings* of a life lived in communion with the Spirit of God, we sometimes stay seated when Christ comes *calling*. It's part of our nature, but it's not what God wants for us.

For that reason, Paul is writing to us to exhort us and remind us that God's desire for us is that we abound. That we grow. That we accomplish His work. That we become people who rejoice and testify through our lives with full confidence in the Lord. That we become completed in Christ Jesus. Not *cultural* Christians, but *committed* Christians who step out in discipleship.

So we see that we have a calling, but we also know that we have a bent toward apathy and unresponsiveness to God. The way we discover where we're at in our walk with the Lord is through a personal evaluation of the heart.

This is what Paul does in verses 8 through 11. There we read:

Philippians 3.8-11 - Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

So here, Paul turns this epistle on himself and goes through what we've just talked about. He says, "Look, I want to receive the conforming that Jesus Christ has for me. I want that resurrection power. I want what God is offering me, so where am I at with the Lord? Is that happening in my life? When I look within, have I met my belief with action? Have I determined to pursue God or haven't I?"

And in Paul we receive such a wonderful example of the supernatural life that God intends for each of us. And he sets it out in terms that are simple for us.

First of all, he explains the pursuit.

He says:

Philippians 3.8 - Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ.

The pursuit of the Godly life is to know Jesus Christ. I'm sure most of you have heard this passage taught and it's been explained that the word for knowledge there is a very personal word. In fact, it's a word of intimacy. It's a word of passion and close relationship. And we need to lock into the understanding that life is about my relationship with Jesus, your relationship with Jesus and that's it. In Jesus, all the rest of human living is understood and empowered. But, the pursuit of my life is to draw nearer to Jesus.

And this is a profound building block for anyone who wants to become strengthened in their spirituality. Because, Paul the Apostle, the great pastor and teacher and writer and leader, he comes here and says, "The pursuit of life is not to plant churches. The pursuit of life is not economic stability. The pursuit of life is not academic understanding. The pursuit of life is intimate relationship with a person, Jesus Christ."

And here, as an aging man, Paul's love for God had not dwindled. He says here that everything else in his life, everything he'd done, everything he was, is refuse compared to what he had with Jesus. Because in the height of love is found the depth of peace.

But loving God isn't passive. It requires action. It requires a surrender of all other things. We must suffer the loss of those other competitors for our devotion. Those other pursuits which can attract us, be they good or bad, must be replaced with a submission to Jesus Christ. There must be an abdication of our own will and an acceptance of the will of God, who then supplies us with new tasks and new purposes and new assignments. There were things, no doubt, that Paul had been consumed with before his conversion to Christ. Some of them were evil; the

persecution of the Church. Some of them of course were not evil. But all of them, he says, were forfeit. All of them were not only less important to him, they were jettisoned completely, so that he could fill that space with the Person of Jesus Christ.

When the police are in pursuit of a criminal, everything else is set aside. That is their primary focus. The longest police pursuit on record happened a few years ago in Europe. It spanned 2 days, 54 hours I believe, and covered 600 miles. But there was a singular focus for those who were on the chase.

Each of us must evaluate our pursuits this morning. Whatever we're chasing after in this life, is it because we've been charged by our Savior to accomplish them, or is it something that is competing with our Godly devotion and Christ's Lordship in our hearts?

Paul goes on and takes a look at his religious activity in verse 9.

Philippians 3.9 - and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;

Already in this letter he's addressed the problem of legalism and the danger it is to living a Spirit-led life. But, again, he's exposing himself here for our benefit. He's evaluating himself to see if his behavior is motivated by any sort of self-righteousness or pharisaical pride. These are traits that are innate in us and must be rooted out. Because the carnal work of legalism cannot produce righteousness in our lives. Righteousness meaning right standing or equity with God. To attempt to relate to God through some legalistic performance is a rejection of Christ's sufficiency. We are called to action, we are called to commitment. But if those things aren't *found* in Christ, then they are being done in vain. So, I need to evaluate myself to see if I'm trying to relate to God through legalism and self-righteousness, because that is going to stop the production of fruit in my life.

Philippians 3.10-11 - that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

The resurrection is not just about passing through death into heaven. That is the most significant aspect of it, but that's not all it is. It's not just a future hope. It is also a present power. It is what brings us a sort of invincibility in life. It's what transforms a regular person into someone who can joyfully walk through the valley of the shadow of death. It is the power of the resurrection that makes it possible for us to put our faith into real action. Because our hope is not empty. It is sure and it is strong and it is grounded in the fact that God can do whatever He wants, and what He wants is to redeem and transform and perfect the people of earth and He has the power to do so.

A Christian who is focused on the resurrection power of Jesus is not only going to be full of faith, but they're also going to be very heavenly minded. Because when we focus on the resurrection it should keep in our minds the reality that we're going to die one day and after that moment we're going to be finally, fully in the physical presence of Jesus. And our lives will

be reviewed and our service will be rewarded and God will look upon us and show us how we pleased Him while we were on the earth and we will be forever with the Lord.

But not only does the resurrection remind us that we are going to die, it also reminds us that this person in front of me is going to die. And if they are without Jesus, they will spend eternity in the lake of fire. And that is unacceptable. The resurrection empowers our living and it permeates our thinking with hope and with mission.

When we understand how elevated God's plan for His people is, it should inspire us. It should stun us that all of this is available, not to only a few, but to anyone who wants to take hold of the Spirit-filled life.

But there is a cost to discipleship. It requires something of us. It requires that we unite our hearts with Jesus Christ, follow after Him and be conformed to His image. And that image is one of suffering and self-sacrifice. It is an image of service and of humility. And if we really want to receive the satisfaction and the completion and the fullness of Jesus Christ, then we must be willing to put belief into action and take on a cross ourselves. **That** is the path that leads to a life elevated above the natural. You cannot receive the power of God if you're unwilling to be in the presence of God. And to live in the presence of God requires surrender.

Abraham *believed* and it was accounted to him for righteousness, but that righteousness would have been worth very little if he was unwilling to lay his son on the altar and ready him for sacrifice. God brought him to the moment of decision, where it was actually going to cost him something. But he trusted in the Lord. He trusted in the resurrection. And he had relinquished control of his life to God, whose plans were far better and more wonderful.

Peter was a great winner of souls, but his calling required him to actually *leave* his nets. *Leave* his father. *Leave* his life to follow after the Lord. The story would have been much different if Peter had said, "Jesus, I definitely want to follow You, but it'll have to only be on weekends. You can have this much of my life to work with and if it goes well, then I'll give you a little more of myself and we'll see how it develops."

So what is the point? Is the point that anyone who becomes a Christian must immediately upend their life and change everything they're doing? No.

But discipleship costs something. Every time. And so we, as men of God, must look within ourselves and ask the questions we see raised here. Are we sacrificing anything for our Lord? Are we suffering in any way? Have we answered the call in full surrender? To be acquainted with Jesus is to be acquainted with grief the Bible says. And, while we don't desire to find suffering and grief for ourselves, we don't want to go out and *LOOK* for suffering, but this is the arrangement of the Christian life. We cannot have the blessings of Christianity without the expense of our lives. It requires surrender. It requires sacrifice. Because it is through submission that we discover the fullness of God. It is through submission that we become conformed to His death and know the power of His resurrection.

God is going to bring every one of us into situations where our love for Him will be tested. Where our lives display whether we're following with personal passion or if we've allowed our love to dim and our service to be just lipservice. There will be a moment at our fishing nets, at

our tax booth, on the road, on the mountain, where Jesus comes to us and says, "Will you pursue Me?"

In those moments, we must take the path of the disciple because it is in the pursuit that we find power, peace and purpose.