

## Philippians 3v10-11

Today is Resurrection Sunday and the message ringing out around the world is: 'He is not here, he is risen ... come, see the place where he lay.' Paul is exultant, he's enraptured, when he glories in the fact in Romans 1:4 that *'God powerfully raised him from the dead.'* Praise God ... it points to an empty cross and an empty tomb.

So we read in Philippians 2:9, *'Because of this, God raised him up to the heights of heaven and gave him a name that is above every other name ...'*

Yes, God has exalted him far above all - the Lord Jesus is enthroned and acclaimed as a Prince and a Saviour (Acts 5:31), he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high (Hebrews 1:3), he is crowned and clothed with glory and honour (Hebrews 2:9) - the old hymn penned by Thomas Kelly is spot on when it says:

*The head that once was crowned with thorns, Is crowned with glory now, A royal diadem adorns, The mighty victor's brow!*

Jesus is alive - we serve a living Saviour - and, for you and me, that means in the words of Bill Gaither: *Because he lives, I can face tomorrow; Because he lives, all fear is gone; Because I know he holds the future, And life is worth the living, Just because he lives!*

## 'that I may know him ...'

And that's what Paul is focusing on right here in Philippians 3 ... he looks over his shoulder in verses 7-9 when he pays tribute to God's extravagant grace in his life; then he looks forward by faith into the future with a sense of keen anticipation in verses 20-21, for he acknowledges that *'our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there ...'*

So, in light of time and eternity, on bended knee before that higher throne, Paul bares his heart - this is what he longs for more than anything else in all the world - in his own words, he testified in verse 8 that he considers *'everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.'* It's a fervent aspiration for a life that's really worth the living; in a few words, the preacher-man Paul spells out his personal vision statement:

*'I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.'*

Paul yearns, he hungers, for four things: **one**, to know Christ more deeply - that's personal; **two**, to live for Christ more dynamically - that's powerful; **three**, to suffer with Christ more dependently - that's

painful; and, **four**, to look for Christ more diligently - that's practical.

**Number one**, he wants to know Christ more deeply.

The bottom line is that Paul has seen so many folks who've been content to live their lives on the low road. That's not for him! He's taking the high road. Mediocrity and the humdrum are not his cup of tea. He never got bored with knowing Jesus.

These words are the heart cry of a man earnestly seeking after God, of a man who means business with God, of a man who wants to spend the rest of his life on a higher plane, who wants to soar to heights unknown ...

**He longed for Jesus, simply Jesus, nothing more, nothing less, nothing else. He says: 'Lord, I want to know you better. I want to know you more and more!'**

Graham Kendrick captured the sentiments of Paul's desire in the words of his beautiful song: *All I once held dear, built my life upon; All this world reveres, and wants to own; All I once thought gain, I have counted loss; Spent and worthless now, compared to this ... Knowing you, Jesus, knowing you, there is no greater thing; You're my all, you're the best, you're my joy, my righteousness, and I love you, Lord.*

**This is Paul's all-consuming passion, it's the throbbing ambition of his life. It's the prime**

**reason why he falls out of his hammock in the morning. Yes, he came first to know the Lord on the Damascus highway when Jesus appeared to him in a bolt of white fire and spoke to him in person. That intrusion was ok for starters.**

However, Paul wants this relationship to be more than a casual, polite acquaintance. Much more. He wants the buzz, the adrenaline surge, of being connected in an experiential way - you see, it's not the know of the intellect where you tick all the boxes and give all the right answers, but it's the know of intimacy where the pulse races and the heart beats faster.

**Think about it like this: we know the newly appointed First Minister of Scotland, we know his name, we know who he is, but very few of us know him personally. We're all aware of the president of the USA; we know who he is by name, but even fewer among us would claim to know him one-on-one as a person. Well, that's the mega difference between knowing someone and really knowing someone!**

Up in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, in days of yore, many of the traditional crofts had two reception rooms - one was a 'but' and the other was a 'ben'. No matter who came chapping on the front door, they were automatically shown in to the 'but'. When a special friend came along to visit, it

was different - they were taken into the 'ben'. You see, there's no difference in the warmth of the welcome, but there is a huge difference in the relationship.

That's why you would often hear the softly spoken crofters saying among themselves, 'I see you were far ben with so-and-so.' Paul says in verse 10, 'I want to be far ben with God!'

There's an old hymn penned by Eliza Hewitt which sums it up so eloquently: *More about Jesus would I know, More of his grace to others show, More of his saving fulness see, More of his love who died for me. More, more about Jesus ...*

Yes, says Paul, I know him because he is my Rock and my Redeemer, I've tasted and I've seen that the Lord is so good and faithful ... but I'm not satisfied, I want more; the bites at the cherry of grace and mercy have only whetted my appetite; I have an insatiable desire, I have an unquenchable thirst, to know him as the Lover of my soul ... I want more!

And that'll take **time** - a lifetime - for such a meaningful relationship simply doesn't happen overnight, you've got to work at it ... it'll take **talk** - we speak with him in the quiet place and, from an open Bible, we hear his voice as he communes with us ... it'll take **trust** - a genuine willingness for you and I to walk close beside our Shepherd

through all the ups and downs of life - we love him and he loves us, and we know that He knows best.

Number two, he wants to live for Christ more dynamically.

Paul shines the torchlight here on the 'power of the resurrection' - hey, that's a demonstration of power like no other. This is God's gelignite! And we've experienced it ... that's what happened in your life and mine when we passed from death to life. The stone was rolled away.

Paul says in Ephesians 2 that 'he made us alive with Christ ... and he raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ.' Yes, that's the power of the cross and the power of the risen Christ - this power is dynamite! It is explosive - the potential of such power is phenomenal ... and this is what Paul is pursuing day by day. The dynamic of God is an unleashing of eternal energy in our lives. There's no need for us to be trounced when we engage with the enemy. We step up to the plate in the illustrious triumph of Jesus. We fight the adversary from the position of victory. Because the Lord is risen, and Jesus is alive, we are over comers - you find echoes of that capital truth at the end of Romans 8.

You see, in ourselves, we can do nothing, we are nothing, we have nothing; but, in

Christ, we are more than conquerors! We're on the winning team!

So often we fail to adequately cope with the harrowing conflicts of this life, we find it enormously difficult to conquer the binding habits of sin, it is a constant struggle for us to live lives of purity and holiness - I'm sure we tick all those boxes and it grieves us, it concerns us, it nags away at us ... the way to do it, the *only* way to do it, is for us to draw on the plenteous resources we have in Jesus - that is, his risen life ... for we are alive unto God.

The power of the resurrection makes all the difference - believe it or not, the same power that God used to raise Jesus from the dead is available to every one of us. For you and I, we need to make sure that our lives are plugged in and switched on. In this context, God wants us to be power hungry!

Number three, he wants to suffer with Christ more dependently.

Did you notice how Paul verbalised it in his prayer, a prayer where every word counts? He used the word '*sharing*'. But you say to me, sharing in what? In the joys and triumphs of Jesus, in the love and grace of Jesus, in the blessings of Jesus ...? Yes, sure, all of this and more, but that's not what he prayed! He talks openly and candidly about '*sharing in his sufferings*.'

Truth be told, this is more than just sharing in something - the Greek word Paul used is *koinonia*, he's focusing here on fellowship! And the depth of such fellowship is what is uppermost in his mind. So often we think of fellowship as staying behind for a cup of tea and a slice of cake after a meeting ... but this is radically different! Paul is not talking about fellowship around a casserole, but fellowship around a cross.

This is fellowship on a whole new level - for you and I, it is a real privilege for us to suffer with him, to bear the scars of battle, to know the pangs that rend the human heart, to feel the pain that torments the body, to encounter the anguish that affliction brings, to reel under the chilling wind of adversity, to encounter opposition to a cause and a Christ whom we treasure - that is fellowship with him in his sufferings. It means a cross!

The trials of life - troublesome times, turbulent days, tumultuous moments. What an amazing honour to think that the Lord counts us worthy to face them. You may not have seen it like that before, but that is fellowship with a capital F. And suffering is one of those places where our tiny world and his intersects. In such fellowship, we capitalise on where our world merges with his.

Charles Wesley expressed it like this: *Thy love for a sinner declare, Thy passion and death on the tree; My spirit to Calvary bear, To suffer and triumph with thee.*

It entails each of us taking up and bearing the cross in our lives. A painful experience. It may hurt, it could sting. It's sore. It takes undiluted commitment for there is a price to pay and it may cost us dear. We may be the butt of cynical jokes. Perhaps subject to ridicule or even prone to ostracism. In all probability, misunderstood. As we read at the end of Hebrews, there is a reproach to be willingly and gladly borne for the sake of the Lord Jesus. That's fellowship!

Number four, he wants to look for Christ more diligently.

You can see what's happening here in the text and it's most unusual - did you notice it as we read it earlier? Paul moves from a resurrection, to a sacrifice, to a death. On the face of it, it all appears to be back to front, almost like putting the cart before the horse.

The baseline is, we can't have a resurrection without a death. So he says, *'becoming like him in his death.'* That's when we die daily to self, and to sin, and to Satan.

When we die to each of these three influences in our lives then we become alive in Jesus. It's when I is dethroned and

Christ is enthroned - it's when I is crucified and Christ is crowned. As the Lord Jesus said himself, it is only when the corn of wheat falls into the ground and dies that it bears much fruit.

Ah, beloved, that's why Jesus came into the world. Calvary was the aim of the incarnation. He was born to die. Then he died to live. The same can be true in your life and mine if we're willing to sign our names to the sentiments so movingly penned by Paul, 'Lord, I want to know you ...'

In closing, it's worth noting that the phrase used in verse 11 is unique - it's the only place in the New Testament where this form of the Greek word for resurrection is used ... it means, 'out resurrection', that is, the resurrection 'out from the dead ones.' And that'll happen when the Lord returns for his own people and we rise to be with him in the air - 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. Paul is looking forward to that wonderful hour when the 'dead in Christ' shall rise and, as he says himself, we shall be with the Lord forever. So his eyes are scanning the distant horizon, his ears are cocked listening for the sound of the trumpet - he's excited.

And that's why he has the attitude that he has - he's not content with where he's at today - he wants to go deeper into Jesus,

and he wants to reach higher in his quest for gold and God. His aspiration is to get to know God better ... and he wants to spend the balance of his years on earth:

**one**, knowing Christ more intimately; **two**, drawing upon his resurrection power more increasingly; **three**, entering into his sufferings more personally; and, **four**, being conformed to his image more completely.

The chorus sums it up so very well - let's make this our prayer on this Easter Lord's Day: *The greatest thing in all my life is knowing you, The greatest thing in all my life is knowing you, I want to know you more, I want to know you more, The greatest thing in all my life is knowing you.*