

The Wisdom of Knowing Your Worth

Philippians 3

November 16, 2014

In 2004 Burt Meerow, 65 years old, retired after selling his business. He and his wife, Joanne, had enough money to spend their retirement skiing in Vermont, golfing in Florida and visiting their children and grandchildren in New York City - all from their home in New Jersey. One day they were at their fancy country club and someone gave them a tip on an investor. He was a Manhattan stockbroker who brought in better than expected returns for his clients. He had clients from California to Florida to the Persian Gulf. So, Burt and Joanne took their retirement money and invested it with this man through a money-management unit at a major insurance company.

A few years later, December 11, 2008, Burt took Joanne to the doctor. While she was having a cortisone shot in her hip he took a call on his cell and went into a panic. He started yelling out, "I have no money! I have no money!"

You see, on December 11, the Manhattan stockbroker, Bernie Madoff was arrested and it became public that most of the money people had invested with him and most of the returns on their investments - were gone. An estimated \$18 billion of investment money was lost.

Burt and Joanne lost 80% of their financial wealth. They sold their New Jersey home. They unloaded their condo in Florida. They sold their share in a ski home in Vermont and bought a smaller home there. They even began volunteering at the ski resort in exchange for free skiing. ~According to Diana Henriques of the New York Times. (Diana Henriques, December 7, 2013, The New York Times)

You see, Burt and Joanne Meerow's worth was not invested in what they thought it was invested. They were cheated and scammed and I'm sure they had many moments of great anger.

Now you may not have 2 vacation homes, a country club membership and millions of dollars to invest, but you do have something of much greater worth. You have an eternal soul and every day you are being asked to invest your life in all sorts of lies and schemes, and one day we will see these things all as a big fraud. And on that day there will be mourning over such a great loss.

This terrible dodge should make you angry. It should make me angry. But usually we just don't see it.

In our text today the apostle Paul sees the scam and he is warning the church in Philippi.

Please turn in your Bibles to Philippians 3. In your pew Bible that will be page 1828. For those of you who know me, you know that I am not a trained preacher. I counted this

week and this is only my 11th sermon - ever. Which is about 5 more sermons than I remember having preached but way fewer than Pastor Jeff preaches in a year, let alone his lifetime. I say that to say this: please pray for me as I share with you this morning. And please remember to pray for anyone who is up here speaking at any time, for we know that the true work of a sermon is that of the Holy Spirit to apply it to our lives and bring true change.

Philippians 3 - beginning in verse 1.

Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh.

The book of Philippians is a letter that Paul is writing to the Christians in Philippi while he is in prison in Rome. He has a good relationship with them and has told them many things in person. Now he is reminding them again. He warns them about men who do evil. He calls them "dogs".

Now in America dogs win talent shows - over people. Dogs have birthday parties and special treats made just for them. We love dogs and often treat them better than people. But in the ancient world dogs were mangy things that roamed around scavenging for food and were as low as rats.

Paul is so mad about what these evil men are doing he is giving himself over to name calling. And what these men are doing is bad enough to warrant that. For these men are saying that you can be justified, you can be made right with God merely by keeping with outward signs. Particularly, they are requiring the religious rite of circumcision. But Paul says, "No! We are only made right with God if we are made right with God inwardly. And true circumcision is a spiritual matter of the heart." (See the end of Romans 2 for more on that.) These men are saying you must worship God according to the traditions and customs handed down to us. Paul says, "No! We worship by the Spirit of God." These men are saying that we can put our confidence in proper ancestry, traditions and religious interpretations. Paul says, "No! We glory only in Christ Jesus."

Now maybe you are here today and you have no idea what I am talking about. You might be thinking, "OK, so Paul is calling them rats because they like their religion better than his religion?"

But this is what I want you to see. These men are selling bad investments. They are saying, "Find your worth in the physical, outward signs of religion." If you do A + B + C you get God, or at least His approval and blessing. And Paul is saying, "No! If you do A + B + C apart from Jesus Christ all you get is regret and disappointment and ultimately death."

How can Paul be so sure? Well, we can see that Paul knows about this first hand. As we continue reading in our text we see that for years, Paul was all about A+B+C and he was very good at it.

Hopefully you still have your Bibles open. We're still on page 1828 of the pew Bible if you closed them. Let's start reading with Philippians 3:4 - Paul used to participate in this scam and he is about to show everyone how good he was at it:

Though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

Paul says, "I followed all the religious rites perfectly. I was born to the 'Chosen People' and I can prove it." "Not only am I a Hebrew, but I speak Hebrew and lived a Hebrew culture lifestyle" - this when many Jews were living a Greek lifestyle and speaking Greek and Latin.

Paul says he was a nit-picky follower of the Jewish law. He got every last rule down perfectly and he did it with Passion. He proved his passion by taking the leadership in seeking out and persecuting the scoundrels (as he saw them then) who were trying to change things. And to top it all off Paul says - everyone knew I was doing it "right".

Now, can you imagine if Paul showed up to your kids school or your work place or wherever you might be and he walks up to you and says:

"Hey, yeah, I was circumcised on the 8th day. Yeah, I can trace my ancestry all the way back to a man named Benjamin."

You would not be impressed. You might be a little concerned. Most of us do not find our worth in ancient Jewish law and tradition. What these evil men were valuing is not valuable to most of us anymore. But more importantly it is not valuable to God. It is an empty investment. And what made Paul so mad was that these men were telling people to stake their eternal souls on this.

Now if we go back to your kids' school or your work and we listen to what people are talking about, since hopefully they are not boasting about their circumcision; someone might say something like... "Yeah, my kid plays soccer with the local elite team but next week he has to miss a game because he has a really important swim meet. But he told me that he might want to drop basketball and just do the soccer and swimming because he doesn't have enough time for his robotics club. He's so smart. But he's also really talented in sports. And I was hoping he would try out for the school play because I used to love being in the musical when I was in high school."

Now maybe not, but it is quite possible that parents like this find a great deal of their worth in their children, or maybe in their children's 'success'?

Or maybe someone else finds their worth in their financial status or in finding approval in the eyes of other people.

Or...well, let's be honest and not worry about where other people find their worth. Where do you find your worth? Do you feel worth anything today? Why?

What is in the profit and loss categories of your life? What life assets do you have?

What have you been investing in this past week? Is it a true investment? Or - in light of the worth of your soul for all eternity - is it a scam?

Philippians 3:7 - Paul says:

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ - the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. 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 says, "I was really good at everything my culture valued and then I met Jesus and I learned that all of those things were worth nothing when it comes to whether or not God and I were on good terms.

You see, all of us start out under sin. As Romans 3:10 and following says:

As it is written: There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes.

Our worthiness before God is not even at 0. It is less than 0 because we were by nature objects of God's wrath. Ephesians 2

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of God's wrath.

All these things that I look to for my worth - how smart I am, how good I look, how many friends I have, how kind I am, how skillful I am, how perfectly I follow all the religious rules

- these are not good enough. O what a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, makes those who put their faith in Him - alive, in Christ.

Jesus Christ, God Himself, became a lowly human. He lived a perfect, sinless life like we never could - and so He was acceptable to God. He was worthy.

God calls us to live holy, perfect lives, but we cannot. So, our relationship with God is not right. And the punishment for not having that right relationship is death for us.

Jesus didn't deserve that punishment because He lived His life perfectly. Yet even though He did not deserve the death punishment He went to the cross and took it anyway - for us.

Because He was perfect He could die for my sin, for your sin, for her sin, for sins of people from every people group from every part of this planet. And having completely paid the price for the sins of those who would believe in Him He was buried and then rose again from the dead.

And now Jesus is the gateway to a right relationship with God. Jesus is the only possible source of value and worth for the eternal life of your soul. Because when you couldn't live out God's requirements Jesus did. And He paid the price for your punishment, because if you paid the price yourself - which is eternal death - that would be the end. And all these things we invest our lives in - in which we seek to find value and worth - they cannot pay the price either.

So, Paul says, I'm ditching all these bad investments. My worth is not in any of these things. Instead I want to know Jesus and the power of His resurrection. And he's not saying "I want to know about Jesus." No, he wants to know Jesus personally. And more than that, he wants to be known by Jesus.

And so, in faith, Paul repented of all that was before, he turned away from it, and he looked to Jesus. Again, Philippians 3:7 and following:

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ - the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. 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 used to have all that these evil men were selling, and he gave it up in order to receive a relationship with Jesus Christ. And he has come to see how good this new relationship is so he wants more. And Paul knows that “more” will most likely come through suffering.

When I asked you earlier if you were worth anything, I hope that you were able to say, “Yes, because I am known by Jesus, through faith, God, the God, the eternal, infinite, most beautiful, wonderful God - delights in me. I am His own. I am His heir. He sings over me. I am valuable in His eyes.

Yet, I know that some of you cannot say that. To you I say, God loves you too. Repent from finding your worth in things that will ultimately let you down and look to Jesus in faith and find your true worth today that by the grace and goodness of God you too can be privileged to participate in the resurrection.

If by faith we latch on to the finished work of Christ - who rectified our relationship with God, than we know our ultimate eternal destination. We know what is at the end of our earthly life. Our citizenship in heaven is secure in Jesus. However, the wisdom of knowing our worth is not only found in knowing where we are going to end up. The wisdom of knowing our worth is also found in knowing what to do along the way.

If my value is found in Christ alone, why do I spend so much time and energy on things that are not His priorities? Worse than that, if my settled worth is in Christ alone why do I still hedge my bets, “diversify my wealth” so to speak, and continue to seek out....others’ approval....wealth and financial security....or whatever it is, apart from Christ, in which I invest my life in order to feel like I am worth something.

If you look back at our passage - Philippians 3:18 (pause) Philippians 3:18:

For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.

Now if these people are destined for destruction then they are not believers, but the principal is the same for us. Are we living as enemies of Christ because our glory is found in things that are of no worth...things that if we make them our worth will be our shame? Are we too concerned with earthly things?

In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul says a similar thing, this time to believers. He says:

What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on...those who use the things of the world, (should live) as if not engrossed in them. For this present world in its present form is passing away. (7:29a, 31)

I look around at my life and I see that I am on a merry-go-round of activity and comfort and entertainment and I wonder...my life is of inestimable value because of what Jesus has done for me. How am I investing that worth in my life each moment? We're not ever going to be perfect in this life. But we must recognize our worth is only found in Jesus and invest that worth in things that matter to Him.

Philippians 3:12-14

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

And jump down to verse 20

For our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!

Oh, dear friends. Don't be fooled into investing your eternal life in earthly things. Find your worth in Jesus Christ and know that He is a treasure beyond any we can imagine.

413 in your hymnals is an old hymn which you probably do not know the tune to but the text says:

*Jesus, priceless treasure, source of purest pleasure, truest friend to me:
Long my heart hath panted, 'Til it well nigh fainted, thirsting after Thee.
Thine I am, O spotless Lamb, I will suffer nought to hide Thee,
ask for naught beside Thee.*

This present world in its present form is passing away. The time is short. Since we have such a great worth in Jesus, let us not waste it. Let us only use the things of the world as if not engrossed in them. Because they desperately want to suck us in and pull us back into their deceit.

Now I am ready to close. But in my heart I know that most of you will not respond to the challenge I just made. Because I know that I do not want to respond to the challenge I just made. In my mind I agree that I want Jesus, only Jesus. But in my heart, which still has sin residue all in it - I want to be engrossed in the things of this world and I want to find my satisfaction in all these things. I doubt if I can truly find my worth ONLY in Jesus.

What? Actually stop watching my favorite TV show or doing my favorite online activity or whatever is taking up too much time and engrossing me in this world and ACTUALLY spend more time in God's Word and in prayer and in discipleship and evangelism? Actually let the Holy Spirit renew my mind and stop conforming to the pattern of this world?

But everyone else - and most of the Christians I know - are doing it this way God? This is the American way and I'm a..... Christian. I'm a disciple of Jesus Christ who loves me so much and has good plans for me. And if I'm ever going to make my joy complete... I must change - in my heart. I must repent. I must be changed.

Let's close with these words from Paul found in Ephesians 5:15-17

Be very careful, then, how you live - not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

J. R. Gehlert