

Under Pressure

Press On – Know Christ

October 15, 2023

Overarching Theme: 2023 – Living the Dream

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.

Core Point: 2023 can be a year of living the dream of faithful discipleship as we take a next step forward in following Jesus Christ.

Reflect on this Scripture: Philippians 3:1-14

Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is not troublesome to me, and for you it is a safeguard. Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh - even thou I, too, have reason for confidence in the flesh.

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith.

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it

my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

Commentary: In introducing this passage, Paul asks the Philippians to beware of “those who mutilate the flesh.” It is possible that these persons were Gentile converts to Judaism (adopting the rite of circumcision, etc.) who later became Christ followers. They were promoting the idea that Gentile followers of Christ (such as the Philippians) must also add an external ritual (circumcision) to be right with God. In principle Paul places no confidence in such externalities. But Paul then goes on to boast: “If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh (legal observance and performance), I have more” (verse 4b).

What follows are seven credentials, listed succinctly for rhetorical punch. Most striking is the closing credential: “as to righteousness under the law, blameless” (Philippians 3:6), Paul’s past Torah observance in line with Pharisaic interpretation. By *this* standard, Paul says his past record is spotless.

Now Paul throws his past trophies out the window: “Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ” (Philippians 3:7). Paul deems these things “rubbish” (New Revised Standard Version), better translated “refuse”, since the strength of the word is hardly an accident (its only New Testament appearance). Paul’s shift in perspective moves dramatically from a righteousness defined by the Torah toward “the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (verses 8-9).

In summary, Paul writes passionately about his devotion to Christ. He uses rhetorical strategies to emphasize the “loss” of past trophies and “the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus”, names Christ by name often (verses 7, 8, 9, 14), speaks in personal, even passionate terms about his relationship with Christ, and longs deeply to “know” (here “experience”) Christ, his resurrection, and his sufferings — and thereby to be conformed with him in his death (verse 10). The passion and personal nature of Paul’s words reflect one who has known firsthand a complete life makeover and reorientation to a new Lord, for whose sake “all things” achieved in the past are now comparatively worthless. And so, Paul cannot but write fervently, personally, and lovingly about this new path and participation in Christ’s work — partially to instruct others to press on to know Christ, but no less to reflect authentically his own experience.

-adapted from online commentary by Troy Troftgruben

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. The fledgling Philippian Christian community was apparently feeling pressure from traveling teachers who stressed the necessity of Jewish practices (circumcision, etc.) in order for them to be fully Christian. Why do you think Paul objects to this teaching so strongly?
2. Why do you think Paul describes physically uncircumcised Philippians as "the circumcision?" Does it have anything to do with the following statement "who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus?"
3. Why do you think Paul recounts his significant religious pedigree in such detail? How does he compare his background as a Pharisee with his experience of knowing Christ Jesus his Lord?
4. What is the source of Paul's righteousness (v.9)? What do you think he means when he writes "I want to know Christ?" (v. 10).
5. Paul is pressing on "toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus." What is one way that you can press on toward this goal today?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: Philippians 3:10-12
"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own."