

April 18, 2004

Philippians 3: 9-14

⁹and 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.

¹⁰I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

¹¹and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

¹²Not 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.

¹³Brothers, 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,

¹⁴I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Paul is one of my heroes. I like people who live their gift to its full potential. Paul is like this. We can learn from him principles on how to be an effective servant of God. The principles of God are the same for everyone. He is the God of equal opportunity.

In verse 12 he says that he is still pressing on to the call. He was an elderly man when he wrote this. He started more churches than anyone else, wrote more portion of the New Testament than anyone else. Why would he say this? Because he wanted to squeeze out every ounce of God's calling.

Paul was arrested to the call, apprehended by Jesus. I have been arrested - I used to be a drug dealer (happens to be an illegal occupation). I was beaten up first, then I did not control my life anymore, the police did. Paul uses this expression to show how Jesus controlled the goal of his life.

Paul's primary passion was to fulfill his destiny. What was it? To be an apostle? To write most of the theology of the New Testament? To do more than any other apostles have done? What was he really after? He had a simple pursuit that fed all the other pursuits in his life: to know God. It should be the high calling for everyone.

In Paul's life we can see examples to pursue God:

1. ACCESS

His first pursuit is to fulfill his destiny to know God. Before knowing Christ he had spent most of his time seeking the truth. Once he found Christ, he was placed in the truth, he never had to spend his anymore of his time to find righteousness. That's why he is so passionate. There is no obstacle now to get to God, now he can go and start discovering him.

When I moved to Idaho, I discovered what the freedom to access God meant for Paul. In Idaho there are a lot of undiscovered areas, so I got a horse and learnt to ride. I have an Arab horse, he can get to the highest top of mountains where you do not meet other people. Once I arrive to the top after much hassle, the joy of discovering unknown areas overtakes the trouble it took me to get there. My horse takes me there, all I have to do is discover the unknown.

When you become Christian, the throne of God becomes accessible. It is a gift, there is no need to work to get to know Him. Paul was constantly enjoying getting to know God - not just talking about it or craving after it. Jesus suffered the separation from God that was waiting for us. He replaced it with an intimate relationship with God.

2. KNOWING JESUS - coming to know Jesus

Paul was an older man and still said that he wanted to get to know Jesus. A lot of people think they already know Jesus and they get bored with Christianity. There is still more to be discovered, always another level of gold to mine. Paul suffered a lot. Why didn't he quit? Because personal knowledge of God helps to go through the horrible things. In Romans 8 Paul gives a list of what he had to go through but nothing could overcome him. Why? Because he knew God loved him and nothing could separate him from this love.

Romans 8: 35-39

³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

³⁶As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

³⁸For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,

³⁹neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

When life gets difficult for us we try to withdraw and do not want to go forward because it would be painful. But Paul says that nothing can rob us of God's love.

2 Corinthians 3:18

¹⁸And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

How does it work? We look at Jesus - we are changed. How? Where does Jesus live? In us. Our destiny is to become like Jesus. Beholding life is the simplest way to change our lives.

3. HIS RESURRECTED LIFE - know the power of resurrection

Ephesians 1:18-21

¹⁸I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,

¹⁹and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength,

²⁰which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,

²¹far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

Paul talks about the power of resurrection and its exceeding power for us. Paul believed that this resurrection life works in us. Spiritual death stocks us like a wolf stocks a deer that is not strong enough to defend herself.

The story of the Samaritan woman is an example of resurrected life. Jesus said: if you know me, you get never ending source of life. This woman had been married five times and was living with a man not her husband. She must have felt pretty worn out and thought there was nothing for her anymore. But now if she got to know Jesus and the resurrected life, she would never again feel unsatisfied.

If I am not satisfied with knowing Jesus, then it means I am satisfied with sin.

4. SUFFERING - fellowship in the suffering

Paul wanted to know the value of suffering. If there was anything beneficial for me in my life, I always had to suffer for it. It is difficult to live in this world. I am not going to suffer for money, politics, fame but for Jesus. He is worth it. Jesus suffered. Who do we think we are to be different from Him?

5. DEATH - confirmed to death

If you lay down a seed in the ground, the seed dies and bears much fruit. Why was Paul so fruitful? He knew Jesus and saw what happened when Jesus laid down his life. It was fruitful. It is one of the many aspects of knowing God. Paul is willing to give up his own pleasures, and became his joy.

What can God do through the weak things?

I am an example of it:

Instead of working in the slums of India where there is humidity, rats, every kind of disease, no shower for days, I'd rather be on the beach. But I saw Jesus and wanted to know Him better. So it became natural to give up my life for others.

These things fed the passion of Paul. You can live the same principles, and I promise you bear great fruits in your life. You look back and are amazed. No one can take these fruits away from you.

Why would we do all this? Because that is how our core being connects to Him.

If there is anything you suffer for or are hated for it should be because of Jesus. He is worth it. In the world people follow political ideas, ideology of men; people die for these. All the kingdoms of men will fall. Our life is worth more than suffering for earthly kingdoms.