

PAUL'S GREAT DESIRE

TEXT: PHIL. 3:10-14

Introduction:

1. Hudson Taylor, who founded the China Inland Mission, wrote these words: "Fruit-bearing involves cross-bearing. 'Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone.' We know how the Lord Jesus became fruitful – not by bearing His cross only, but by dying on it. Do we know much of fellowship with Him in this? There are not two Christs – an easy-going Christ for easy-going Christians, and a suffering, toiling Christ for exceptional believers. There is only one Christ."
2. The words of the apostle Paul are difficult to comprehend (3:10). His was not the phony "easy-going" Christ, but the genuine suffering Christ.
3. I have entitled tonight's message, "Paul's Great Desire." Paul's great desire is found in 3:10 – "That I may know Him..." Do you know Him? I do not mean, "Do you know *about* Him, but do you know Him?"

I. PAUL WANTED TO KNOW THE LORD JESUS CHRIST IN THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION (3:10).

1. Normally, we would first speak of Christ's sufferings, then His death, and then His resurrection. But Paul first speaks of His resurrection. Why?
2. Remember, Paul wrote this epistle from prison. He knew his upcoming trial could result in his execution. It takes divine strength to suffer for Christ. That is why "the power of His resurrection" is put before "the fellowship of His sufferings" (3:10).
3. Think of all the great Christian martyrs. John the Baptist, Stephen (After his conversion, Paul later admitted that he was "consenting unto his death" – Acts 22:20), then James, the brother of John.
4. With the exception of John, all of the original apostles died as martyrs. In the early days of Christianity, many Christians were thrown to the lions.
5. Read about the Inquisition. The RCC burnt John Hus, Savonarola, William Tyndale, Latimer and Ridley and Cranmer. Many of our Baptist forebears were burned at the stake by the RCC, stretched out on the rack, had their tongues pulled out.
6. Think of them and all the other martyrs. How were they able to endure such suffering? By "the power of His resurrection" (3:10).
7. And Paul knew that he would need that power when it was his time to die (cf. 1:21-23).

8. And this power – the same power that raised Jesus from the dead – is available today to all believers (cf. Eph. 1:19, 20).
9. “If by any means” (3:11) does not express doubt on Paul’s part. It is an expression indicating earnest desire (cf. Rom. 1:9, 10; 11:14).
10. What Paul is saying is that since Christ had suffered, died, and been raised from the dead, Paul wanted to experience the same.
11. Absolute obedience to the will of God is required to experience “the power of His resurrection” (Phil. 3:10, 11).

II. PAUL WANTED TO KNOW THE LORD JESUS CHRIST IN THE FELLOWSHIP OF HIS SUFFERINGS (3:10; cf. 1:29).

1. To know Christ experimentally includes “the fellowship of His sufferings” (Phil. 3:10; cf. I Peter 4:13).
2. Peter’s first epistle has much to say about the sufferings of Christ. “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (I Peter 2:21).
3. The Bible teaches us that if a Christian is surrendered to the will of God, he can expect sufferings.
4. In the parable of the sower in Matthew 13 and Mark 4, our Lord refers to the seed which falls on the “stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word’s sake, immediately they are offended.” (Mark 4:16, 17).
5. There are many “conversions” like that.
6. Our Lord said, “Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Mark 8:34). But very few are willing to do that.
7. The apostle Paul was one of the few (cf. Acts 9:15, 16).
8. Paul wrote in II Timothy 3:12, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”
9. The hymn-writer put it this way:
*Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease,
 While others fought to win the prize, and sailed through bloody seas?*
3. Paul was whipped, beaten with rods, imprisoned, betrayed, etc., but he never stopped praising the Lord (cf. II Cor. 11:23-33).

III. PAUL WANTED TO KNOW THE LORD JESUS CHRIST IN THE CONFORMATION OF HIS DEATH (3:10).

1. Paul joyfully (remember “joy” is the key word in this epistle) anticipated leaving this world to meet the Lord, and he knew that probably meant being martyred.
2. Note the word “conformable” (3:10). Paul is speaking here of being conformed to the image of Christ (cf. Rom. 8:29), even in the manner of his death.
3. “Being made conformable unto his death” (Phil. 3:10) does not necessarily mean physical death, but it certainly does mean death to self.
4. Paul said in Gal. 2:20, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.”
5. Again, this speaks of complete surrender to the will of God.
6. Paul says in Phil. 3:13, “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended...”
7. Paul acknowledged that he was not there yet (3:12-14). And if he had not yet attained, it is certain no one else has, this side of heaven.
8. “The mark” (Phil. 3:14) is the goal, the finish line. When Paul says: “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended...” he is saying, “I haven’t arrived yet.”

CONCLUSION:

1. Paul often used military illustrations – “Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please Him who hath chosen him to be a soldier” (II Tim. 2:3, 4).
2. He also many athletic illustrations – “And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully” (II Tim. 2:5).
3. Here in Phil. 3:13 and 14, Paul is using athletic imagery. Perhaps he is referring to a foot race, maybe a chariot race. If you are saved, you too are in the race.
4. The goal is perfection (Phil. 3:12, 15; Matt. 5:48). {Not “sinless perfection.”}
5. Every born again believer is on the track. And God has a special lane in which you are to run.
6. And if you are faithful, God has a prize for you. Paul is not speaking here of salvation. Those in this race are already saved. He is speaking here of rewards and prizes (3:14; cf. I Cor. 9:24-27; II Tim. 4:7, 8).
7. Paul said: “I press toward the mark...” (3:14). That word “press” suggests strong exertion. Weight-lifters “press weights.” Runners press on toward the finish line. Are *you* pressing on?