



Speaker:
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The Apprentice

Series: Philippians · 10 of 10

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Do you know Jesus? Do you *know* him?

Oh I know you know **about** him. You know he existed. You know he died. You know lots about him.

But so does Satan. So do all his angels. And so do many in this world who don't belong to God. You can find out as much about him as is humanly possible yet not know him.

Do you *know* him? What I mean then is: *Are you in a close relationship* with him? Do you count him a friend? Can you call him your brother?

Everything I'm to speak about today is based on the assumption that you know Jesus. Paul knew him. But it's clear he wanted to know him more.

Last time, we looked at this righteousness of God which is given to his people. We said in this way God could declare us innocent. All the wicked things we've done which have caused God to be disappointed and angry have been paid for by Christ Jesus. And we are credited with being as virtuous as him.

Paul had this righteousness. But he yearned to be more acquainted with it. He wanted his life to reflect his exalted status in the eyes of God so he could know Jesus more.

We're focusing on verses 10 and 11 today. I intend to speak about trust we should have in the power of Christ, in what way we share in his sufferings, and remind ourselves of our ultimate goal: to be partakers in the great resurrection of the body at the last day.

We trust in the resurrection power of Christ

Paul says, "that I may know him *and the power of his resurrection.*"

What is this power exactly? **It's the power by which Jesus was raised from the grave.** What manner of divine power is it which can accomplish such a thing!

- This was a power which could rouse Jesus of Nazareth from death itself
- It was a power which brought him back into the land of the living in a glorious new body
- It was a power which translated the saviour into heaven
- And it was a power which reinvested the son with the royal garments and returned his crown, the one which he'd put aside for his saving mission in our world

Paul wanted to be reinvigorated day by day with this same power from heaven.

And he did know this power. He not only knew Christ the person but *Christ the power*. It was this power which got him through his life as an employee in the workforce of God.

Peter knew it too, and wrote to the church:

2 Peter 1:3 (p1224)—His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence

Not only does Peter tell the believers—tell us—we’re given divine power to live for Christ, he makes the point *it comes through knowledge of Christ*. You need to know Christ before you can know his power.

Everyone here today claims to be a Christian. That means you claim to know Christ. And if you know him, you will have already had his divine power working in you.

I’m not asking if you **feel powerful**. The last time I felt powerful was about thirty years ago! We’re talking about a power that sustains you in your relationship with God. And you believers can be confident God WILL sustain you every day for the rest of your lives.

But Paul sets us an example of wanting more. He wanted to experience more of the power of God in his life. Why would he do that? What benefit is there for us in having a greater measure of this amazing power of the resurrected Christ?

Simply this: the more power we have, the more we’ll accomplish for our King:

- When we’re weary, his power can enable us to carry on in his service
- When temptation comes, his power can enable us to put up more of a fight
- And when we feel frightened about praying in front of people or evangelizing, his power can enable us to be courageous.

There are many benefits. But how do you and I access this power? Or to be more precise, how do we get more of it? There’s no prize for this one! **It’s that ancient formula of prayer and obedience**. Whoever you think of as the greatest figures in the history of the church, **every one will have been people of prayer and people who take obedience seriously**.

God really does want to hear us ask him for this power from on high. He tells us in his word how important it is for us to do what he says. And the more we pray, and the more we obey, the more power he’ll entrust us with.

I gave this sermon a title. It’s *The Apprentice*. I know there’s a programme of that name, although I’ve never watched it. Were any of you apprentices? Well if your apprenticeship was structured properly, they would have started you on smaller tasks. I think with some apprentices they had them making the tea for the first year! But they gave you jobs which were less important. Jobs which carried less responsibility. Jobs which, if you messed them up, you wouldn’t blow the factory up! And if you did those things competently, you’d be entrusted with more responsibility.

We might say that the Christian is serving a type of apprenticeship. But this is a lifelong one. In this life, you’ll never be regarded as fully qualified! But still, as you learn the habits of prayer and obedience, you can receive power from God to do greater and greater things. Maybe get more responsibility.

I do sometimes wonder what it’d be like to be someone completely sold out for God. Plenty of believers have wondered the same thing about themselves. The preacher Dwight Moody once said, “The world has yet to see what God will do with a man fully consecrated to Him.” He aimed to be that man.

But as much as it was a noble and godly thought, the harsh reality is **there never has been such a man**. I imagine Moody on his deathbed lamenting the fact HE hadn't been absolutely consecrated in prayer, in holiness, and in zeal.

But friends, we're to try! We're to try like mad! We're to make it our life's goal to become this perfectly consecrated, dedicated servant of the most high, and we should never hold back from that effort through thoughts of how impossible it is.

In one of his letters to the church at Corinth, Paul said:

2 Corinthians 3:18 (p1162)—And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

The more we draw on the resurrection power of Christ, the more we'll be like our saviour.

We partake in the sufferings of Christ

Paul wanted to (v10), "...share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death."

We've seen how knowing Jesus in a proper sense gives us access to his great power. But it also means sharing in his sufferings. What does *this* mean?

The one who's become a servant of the Lord will suffer in this life. It could be very minor:

- It could be, when your family finds out you're a Christian, they don't invite you to certain get-togethers. That might cause you some upset. You may feel a little bit like you're being ostracised from the family, even if only sometimes.
- It could be you hand a gospel leaflet out to someone and they rip it up and throw it on the floor. And it saddens you they hate God so much. You may even feel intimidated by their hostility.

But let's be honest friends; these are not hardships. It's still persecution, but...you'll survive.

At the other end of the spectrum, there are **severe** persecutions. People have been tortured and killed for refusing to disown Jesus. It's a dangerous cowardice which reasons we can lie to our persecutors to save our own skins. It's a mark of a **true** believer that they'd rather die than say, "I don't know him."

All of us will suffer the minor persecutions. Few of us will suffer more than this.

The language the Bible uses to describe our sufferings as believers is sometimes curious. Sometimes, it's very clear. Jesus suffered for his devotion to God. We suffer for *our* devotion to God. So we're suffering like Jesus suffered.

Another aspect to this is to do with our witness. Our willingness to suffer for Christ is a great testimony. When we're the objects of this world's hostility and we react with grace, the world notices. It amounts to a powerful testimony and has been known to result in the salvation of the persecutors themselves.

Paul speaks like we're doing Jesus Christ a service when we suffer. He even says we suffer "on behalf of Christ."

I think those are clear enough. But then there's another aspect of our suffering to do with *fellowship with* Christ. When we suffer for the sake of the gospel, it somehow deepens our fellowship with our saviour.

In a couple of weeks' time, Karen and I are travelling up to Northumberland for a few days. Instead of taking the quickest route, I decided to take a slightly roundabout one. I wanted to see some of Hadrian's Wall. I've only seen one bit of it and that was when I was in school.

I read an illustration recently by Spurgeon. (He probably stole it from someone else!) And it was about these walls the Romans built—like Hadrian's Wall. The Romans somehow made the mortar very hard. When it'd fully dried out, the mortar was almost as hard as the stones themselves.

And the comparison was made to a Christian. We're to become as solid as Christ. And we become more and more like him. **We're to be so much in him, and he's to be so much in us, that the reality of our union with him becomes clear.** So as we suffer for his sake, our union with him becomes more real.

The apostle Paul wasn't some sort of masochist who relished suffering. He simply knew it was to be expected. We should expect it.

If you want some advice on how to avoid all persecution, I can give it to you. By far the best way is to not be a witness for God. If you just completely leave out that aspect of your duty, you can avoid **almost all persecution**. So don't witness to people. Avoid telling people about sin, judgement, Calvary, and so on. When people tell you false things, you should just agree with them. If they say, "Our Michael's now gay; but God accepts us just as we are, doesn't he?" You should just nod and go along with their sinful delusion. Show your face in church, you know, but don't go over the top. You don't want people thinking you're a zealot, an extremist.

Yeh, I'm being facetious. I'd never advise anyone to neglect their duty so they can avoid persecution. Because if you're just a churchgoer, and there's very little evidence that you're constantly looking to serve Jesus Christ, I'm *scared* for you. There are dreadful warnings in scripture for those who hide their faith. If your main concern is not looking stupid in front of people, that's okay; Jesus will just disown you at the judgement.

Let's turn this round and be a bit more positive. I want to encourage you. I want to encourage you in your service for God. There's a joy in serving Jesus in all its different forms. There was an occasion when Paul said he felt joyful after he'd been *violently assaulted* for his faith! So persecution in itself isn't pleasant, but it can be accompanied by a Holy Spirit joy which can override the bitterness of the suffering.

Just think on this: every time you suffer for the name of Jesus Christ, you become more like him, and you draw closer to him, and you delight him!

We share in the death of Christ

Just as Jesus's sufferings culminated in his death, there's a way in which we follow him there too. Paul says here he wants to be "like him [Jesus] in his death."

Some of the stuff I said about sufferings applies to Jesus's death too. But I need to make it clear we've come to one of the mysteries of God. We who have a living faith in Jesus Christ have a connection with him. We have faith in him, but it's more than that. We belong to him, but it's more than that. **We have become one with Christ in a way that it's not possible for us to fully understand.** So this isn't easy stuff. But I'll try my best to be clear with what I understand.

So like when we were talking about our suffering being like Jesus's sufferings, I want to think about some of the ways we can be like Christ in his death.

Have a look at **Romans chapter 6 and verses 6-8 (p1136)**: We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

When Jesus Christ suffered on the cross, he took all the responsibility for everything wicked that I was going to do throughout my entire life. When I was converted, about 30 years ago, our verse tells me my old self was crucified along with Jesus. The old Paul Forrest died!

I didn't really die on the cross. Not in any physical way. But the Bible does use that language. It encourages us to think of our old selves as being killed off and our new selves being brand-new creations.

So we could say we're like Christ in his death when we're converted. And this verse in Romans said one of the results of the death of our old self is "that we would no longer be enslaved to sin." We're "set free from sin." We can live this spiritual life with Christ as our constant companion.

And as we live a life of obedience to him, we mirror **his** life of obedience. His utter commitment to his mission was to lead to his death, but that didn't stop him. **And if we can serve God fearlessly and enthusiastically, not caring if we suffer and even die as martyrs, we copy the obedience of Christ, and in this way we also become like him in his death.**

When we've lived this consecrated life, we'll die physically. There's a morning coming when we'll wake up from our beds for the last time. We'll eat our breakfast as normal and not know it's the last breakfast we'll ever eat.

But as we take our final breaths, I hope we're able to think on Christ. To understand the life of joyful service mixed with sufferings is coming to its end—just like Christ's did. As he died, so we die.

So even in the final act of the divine play we're in, we find that we can become like Christ in his death.

We look forward to our resurrection

Those who know Christ are granted his power to live a victorious life. If they obey him, they'll suffer as he did. And we're all going to die just as Jesus himself was predestined to die.

This is the destiny of us all—the grave. What's it like?

- The Psalmist says (Psa 115:17)—When we're dead, we can't praise the LORD
- King David says (Psa 6:5)—In death, we can't *think* on God
- Psalm 146 says (v4)—In that very day [our] thoughts perish
- Solomon says (Ecc 9:10)—Whatever our hands find to do, we should do it with our might, because when we're dead, there's *no* work, no thoughts, no knowledge, no wisdom
- Job says (Job 14:12)—a man lies down [in death] and rises not again; until the end of this world comes, he will not awake or be roused out of his sleep.

Paul knew all these Scriptures. He knew every one of us must taste the bitterness of death.

But part of the power which raised Christ from the dead will be employed to raise *us* from the dead; v11, “the resurrection from the dead.”

Paul was aware of Scriptures which gave him hope. One of the great promises is found in Daniel chapter 12 and verse 2:

Daniel 12:2 (p907)—...those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

At the end of time, all the people who ever lived on planet Earth will be awakened. All those who didn't receive the saving grace of God in their lives will be doomed. There'll be a great multitude of them, from all eras, all countries, and all religions. This will include all those people *we* know who refuse to acknowledge their sinfulness and their need for Christ. All will be publicly shamed and consigned to the place of everlasting contempt.

But those who during their lives were grafted into the family of God and became his children will enjoy a glorious resurrection! Further on in this chapter in Philippians, it says God “will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” (v20-21)

Jesus himself spoke about this:

John 6:44 (p1075)—No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

Jesus promises that all come to him in faith and receive forgiveness of sins will be raised up on the last day. He says on that day they'll be “made alive.”

The resurrection was Paul's great hope. Look at how he describes it in v11. He says *I want more of this heavenly power so that I can live this life serving God, suffering like he suffered, so that “by any means possible I might attain the resurrection from the dead.”*

Imagine I grabbed a clipboard and did a survey of Christians today and asked them what their greatest hope was, what you think they'd say? What would you say? It's quite surprising, really. I doubt one would say what Paul said.

The language Christians tend to use in this matter is often not the language of the Bible. They'd say things like, *I want to obey God so that by any means possible I may attain...being carried off by the angels to heaven when I die...or by any means possible I might attain...going through the pearly gates and meeting all those who've gone before me.*

Where do they get this from? A book? A film? They didn't get it from Paul, obviously. Just read everything Paul wrote and see if the answers I'd get in my survey can be found in any of his writings—or anywhere in the Bible, for that matter.

Paul's hope was that one day he'd be made alive. He'd be brought back from the dead! And he shares his excitement with the believers:

2 Corinthians 5:2–3—We grow weary in our present bodies, and we long to put on our heavenly bodies like new clothing. For we will put on heavenly bodies; we will not be spirits without bodies.

Jesus will return. There'll be great activity and great noise. ALL THOSE WHO BELONG TO GOD WILL BE MADE ALIVE TOGETHER ON THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY. It's hard to imagine the scene—but by all means, go ahead and try! THIS IS OUR GREAT HOPE. THE

RESURRECTION IS WHAT IT'S ALWAYS BEEN ABOUT. This is the future the saints of old dreamt of, and this is the future **we** dream of.

Is this **your** hope, friends? Do you have confidence in this promise? Then I encourage you today to *keep going*. Strive for perfection in all things pertaining to God. Let no amount of work, or struggle, or inconvenience, or suffering be too much as you head towards that great goal.

Paul knew he wasn't perfect...but he was determined to do his absolute best. From v12:

Philippians 3:12–14—Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but 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 upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Keep going friends, aiming for this great goal, so that you can say with the apostle that by any means possible you hope to attain the resurrection from the dead.

Amen.