

The New Testament constantly describes a conflict between the Holy Spirit and the desires of our flesh. In Romans 8, Paul described it as walking according to the Spirit or living by the flesh (Romans 8:4-6). John described the conflict as love for God or love for the world (1 John 2:15-16). Jesus described the two lives as the narrow gate and the wide gate. The narrow leading to life, wide leading to death (Matthew 7:13-14). The two ways of living are incompatible with one another. Paul had committed his life to continually walking by the Spirit, to loving God. He chose the way that few travel and shunned the way that most enjoy. The way of the flesh, the world and the wide gate is seductively appealing, because it appears to be the superior and a blessed way of living. David warned of this in Psalm 37. David taught us not to fret over the prosperity of those who live according to the world. Like Paul we are to delight in the ways of the Lord, even though we may face hardship along the way. Like Jesus and David taught, Paul reminded the Philippians (and us), that taking the easier more well-traveled route in life will lead to destruction, not prosperity. Many trade short term comfort for long-term destruction.

### **Saturday, December 17, 2011**

*Daily theme: Living for heaven leads to a fruitful life.*

#### **Questions**

*Read Philippians 3:20-21*

1. How does being a citizen of heaven help us be more productive on earth?
2. Why is becoming like Jesus attractive?

#### **Consider**

Recognizing that our citizenship is in heaven and not here releases a great freedom on our life. We are released from the desire to receive our satisfaction in this life and on this earth. We become free to completely give our lives away here, just as Jesus did, because his prize was not here, but past this life. The threat and reality of death could not deter him, because he was focused on what the Father had promised him (Hebrews 12:1-2; Romans 8:18). To a person who is committed to enjoying this life, becoming like Jesus is unattractive. A person who is committed to enjoying this life will avoid following Jesus or maybe pretend to follow Jesus in hopes of getting into heaven. The tragedy is that those people fail to enjoy this life, because this life cannot give us anything long-lasting and they wind up missing heaven as well, because their life choices reveal they had never given their lives to Jesus. They had only practiced religion. Jesus said that only those who give up their life find it. Only those who seek to become like Jesus and give up the pursuit of things in this life find that they enjoy this life while at the same time yearning to be with Jesus. While it doesn't seem like it from the outside, when we give up this world, Jesus gives us the best of both worlds. We receive peace and contentment now the very thing that so many seek in this world but never find. Then we receive eternal life, what evades the majority because they cling onto that which is passing away.

# Pursue the kingdom of God, not the desires of the world.

Philippians 3:7-21

*Sermon Series: Christmas 2011*

Devotional Notes December 12-17, 2011

### **Monday, December 12, 2011**

*Daily theme: Some things once valued no longer hold attraction.*

#### **Questions**

*Read Philippians 3:7-8*

1. What things was Paul referring to?
2. How is knowing Christ superior to all that Paul had given up?

#### **Consider**

When Paul began verse 7, he had already given biographical information in verses 4-6 revealing an impressive heritage. He could trace his lineage back to Benjamin, the 12th son of Jacob. Since he could trace his lineage back to Benjamin, he could also trace his genealogy back to Noah and Adam. Not many, if any, people can do that today. Paul was also highly educated. He received an education similar to an Ivy League education. He was an impressive young man known to the Jewish leaders of the day (Acts 9:1-2). He also had a history of being totally committed to what he believed. However, Paul no longer valued that which he once had. At one time it may have been impressive to comment on his family's heritage or his educational achievements, but no longer. Paul had found something superior that surpassed what had earlier given value and purpose to his life. Paul had learned that what gave him value was not what he had accomplished, but his relationship with Jesus. Paul's testimony reminds us of the parables that Jesus told about the treasure hidden in a field and the pearl of great price (Matthew 13:44-46). Paul's goal was to know Jesus and be known by him. Important as his accomplishments were, Paul understood that they could be more of a hindrance to his relationship with Jesus than a benefit. They were a hindrance because Paul understood that any accomplished person must deal with the lie that they are somehow better because of their accomplishments (or worse because of a lack of success). Jesus loves us for who we are, not what we've done. Has a lack of success caused you to feel less in the kingdom of God? If so how can Paul's words encourage you?

### **Tuesday, December 13, 2011**

*Daily theme: Being transformed by Jesus gives meaning, even in suffering.*

#### **Questions**

*Read Philippians 3:9-11*

1. What does it mean to be found in Jesus?
2. Why was the power of Jesus' resurrection, the fellowship of Jesus'

sufferings and being conformed to Jesus' death attractive to Paul?

### Consider

Paul expressed his desire to be found in Jesus. He explained some of what he meant. He did not desire to be accepted because he had performed his religion at a certain level, but because he had a relationship with Jesus. We can easily understand Paul's point. Who would enjoy being part of a family that demanded a certain level of behavior and academic performance to be fully accepted in the family? We are part of our earthly family because of who we are, not because of what we've done. Paul understood the same is true in God's family. As we receive our name and heritage from our parents, so also Paul taught that our spiritual standing is related to our relationship with Jesus. The truth of relationship transforms the way we live. As we identify with our earthly family, Paul taught us to identify with Jesus. We identify ourselves with Jesus in three areas: his resurrection, his suffering and his death. Identifying with Jesus through the power of his resurrection gives us hope, not even death can conquer us (1 Corinthians 15:55-57). Identifying with Jesus in suffering causes our hearts and spirits to soften as we experience a bit of the pain Jesus endured while on earth. Being conformed to Jesus' death teaches us the power of surrender. As we surrender to what God desires to accomplish in our life, we are set free and empowered. If we no longer fear death or suffering, then our hearts are free from the major fears of humanity. Reflect on how Paul's testimony can help you deal with difficulties in your life.

### Wednesday, December 14, 2011

*Daily theme: In order to go forward we must release what is behind.*

#### Questions

*Read Philippians 3:12-14*

1. What does it mean to press on toward something?
2. How can the past prevent us from making progress?

### Consider

Paul gives us a glimpse into what motivated him. He seemed to always have a goal that he was working toward. He refused to live life on auto-pilot. There was always a new challenge to overcome. Paul liked to compare the Christian life to running a race and striving toward the finish line to receive the prize (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). Paul lived his life with goals laid out before him. He lived in order to reach those goals. If something did not help him reach his goal, then he ignored it. His life was focused toward the finish line of reaching Jesus. As we head toward our goals in Jesus, both our past successes and failures could hinder us. Success can deceive us encouraging complacency, like when a championship team loses to a much weaker team, because they failed to prepare adequately. This explains why it is so difficult in sports to repeat as champion. On the other hand failure can also hinder us, as when we remember our failures and assume that we will fail again. This explains why some teams always lose even though they may be very talented. They just believe they will lose. Paul refused to let his past

success or failures hinder him, because he determined to forget them. He had new things to learn and reach toward. Those who have studied past revivals have found similarities between them. They all ended because the desire to draw closer to Jesus diminished because of all that God had done already. They didn't think they needed a closer relationship with Jesus, but grew comfortable where they were. Paul kept his foot on the gas, as he headed toward Jesus.

### Thursday, December 15, 2011

*Daily theme: In order to go forward we need to live by what we've already learned.*

#### Questions

*Read Philippians 3:15-16*

1. What attitude does Paul say the Christian should have?
2. What are the risks of forgetting what we've learned?

### Consider

While we need to let go of our past successes or failures, we need to remember truths learned and live accordingly. Paul called the believers to the same life attitude that he had. Paul would let nothing come in the way of his pursuit of knowing Jesus. We've all known single-minded people who view life completely through the lens of their goal. Paul invited the Philippians (and us) into joining him in his pursuit of knowing Jesus better. Paul had a focused attitude, so he called others to join his example. Jesus defined Paul's life; Paul calls us to follow his example. One of the great challenges of following Jesus is not growing complacent and begin spiritually coasting on one hand, while on the other hand forgetting what we've learned because we are focused on some aspect of following Jesus. We can get so focused on learning, we forget application. We can get so focused on justice issues that we forget to declare forgiveness in Jesus. We can get so focused on prayer and worship, that we forget serving others. When we forget what we've learned, we run the risk of falling into sin like David did when he sinned with Bathsheba. God reminded him of what God had given to him, but David forgot. God had taught him that he would give to David what he needed and bless his life (2 Samuel 12:8). God declared that he would have even given to him even more, but David forgot the blessing of the Lord on his life and despised the word of the Lord by doing evil. We need to keep pressing forward, but at the same time remember the lessons that the Lord has already given to us and use those lessons to help us understand the new lessons.

### Friday, December 16, 2011

*Daily theme: Giving in to our desires causes us trouble.*

#### Questions

*Read Philippians 3:17-19*

1. What example did Paul refer to?
2. What is the problem with setting our goals on earthly things?

### Consider