

Philippians 3:1-11

Introduction:

Sheldon Vanauken was a native of Carmel, IN. He met his wife Jean Davis (Davy) in a local department store while she was a student at Butler. Their life together is a tragic love story, but includes the fascinating story of their conversion, which took place after they moved to England and developed a friendship with C.S. Lewis. Vanauken recounted it all in the book *A Severe Mercy* (1977). In that book he says the following:

*“The best argument for Christianity is Christians: **their joy**, their certainty, their completeness. But the strongest argument against Christianity is also Christians – when they are somber and **joyless**, when they are self-righteous and smug in complacent consecration, when they are narrow and repressive, then Christianity dies a thousand deaths ... Indeed there are impressive indications that **the positive quality of joy** is in Christianity – and possibly nowhere else.”*

<http://www.amazon.com/Severe-Mercy-Sheldon-Vanauken/dp/0060688246>

Why is it that not all Christians are joyful? Why is it that others seem to exude the most profound joy in the midst of the most trying circumstances? Paul addresses that very issue in the passage we are examining today. We might sum up his conclusion like this:

Our joy in Christ will reach its peak only when we place our complete confidence in Him.

3:1 **Finally** We’re just a bit more than half way through the letter. Is Paul like those preachers that keep telling you they are almost done?

Rejoice in the Lord This is already the 10th verse in this letter in which Paul has used some form of the words “joy” or “rejoice”.

3:2 Watch out for these joy robbers:

Beware of dogs This is an extremely cutting remark. Paul is referring to Jews who believed in Christ but still insisted upon keeping the rituals of Judaism in order to somehow gain merit toward their salvation. These “Judaizers”, as they came to be called, were a perpetual irritant to Paul. He regards their teaching as dangerous and subversive to the gospel of Christ. So “dogs” was an insulting term commonly used at the time by Jews to describe Gentiles. It was used by the Judaizers to express their contempt for Christians who neglected the rites of Judaism, such as circumcision. Paul turns this around and uses the same term about the Judaizers. They’re the real “dogs” as far as Paul is concerned because in their insistence upon rituals they remain unclean, by not fully trusting Christ to purify them of their sins.

Mutilation insults the Judaizers again. They had so distorted the meaning of circumcision that the rite had become nothing more than a mutilation of the body. (See *Believer’s Study Bible*)

3:3 The needed circumcision is not what is done to the body, but the circumcision of the heart.

Deut 30:6 NKJV And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

Rejoice in Christ Jesus Where does our joy come from? It comes from complete confidence in Christ Jesus. Confidence in anything else will ultimately prove to be a joy robber.

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3:4-6 Paul's résumé:

Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel There were many proselytes (converts to Judaism) in those days. Paul was born into God's chosen people and circumcised as an infant.

Of the tribe of Benjamin The city of Jerusalem sat on the border of the territories of Judah and Benjamin. Paul's tribal land was in the very heart of the nation's inheritance.

A Hebrew of Hebrews And while many Jews had taken on Greek ways at this time, he wasn't one of them. He held on to his native Semitic language and culture.

Concerning the law, a Pharisee The Pharisees were the most influential sect of Judaism at that time. They were neither a big group, nor the most powerful politically, but they were widely respected because they held to the most traditional interpretations of the law.

Concerning zeal, persecuting the church Paul started out as an enemy of Christians.

Concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless Paul might as well have been the rich, young, ruler, having kept all the commandments from his youth.

3:7 All that stuff Paul just listed – none of it was worth anything to him in comparison with Christ.

- This is probably the place where we should begin asking ourselves these questions:

Is there anything in my life that I consider more valuable than Christ?

What is it that makes me who I am?

- My family?
 - Friends?
 - Job, career, education?
 - In the case of Sheldon and Davy Vanauken, they considered their love for one another the most valuable thing that they had. They eventually came to see it as totally pagan and idolatrous – when gave their lives to Christ. Relationships with people can sometimes hinder our relationship with Christ.
- We should all get to the point where, like Paul, we can firmly say, “what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.” Joy will be just one of the beneficial results.

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3:8 **the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord**
“the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (ESV)
“the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (NLT)

and count them as rubbish “dung” (KJV) This word honestly meant either excrement or food to be thrown away, which dogs might enjoy. (See *IVP Bible Background Commentary*)

- So think about this: All those things you might be holding on to, that seem so valuable now, in light of eternity they’re not going to be worth anything more to you than garbage – or even dung. That puts things into perspective. It’s hard to find joy in garbage or dung.
- Malcolm Muggeridge, English media celebrity, in *Jesus Rediscovered* (1969):

“I may, I suppose regard myself as a relatively successful man. People occasionally stare at me in the streets; that’s fame; I can fairly easily earn enough money to qualify for admission to the higher slopes of the Internal Revenue Service. That’s success. Furnished with money and a little fame, even the elderly, if they care to, may partake of friendly diversions. That’s pleasure. It might happen once in a while that something I said or wrote was sufficiently heeded for me to persuade myself that it represented a serious impact on our time. That’s fulfillment. Yet, I say to you, and I beg you to believe me, multiply these tiny triumphs by millions, add them all up together, and they are nothing, less than nothing. Indeed, a positive impediment measured against one drop of that living water Christ offers to the spiritually thirsty, irrespective of who or what they are.”

3:7-11 Read this passage to the end again.

Spurgeon:

Maturity in grace makes us willing to part with worldly goods. The green apple needs a sharp twist to separate it from the bough, but the ripe fruit parts readily from the wood. Maturity in grace makes it easier to part with life itself. The unripe pear is scarcely beaten down with much labor, while its mellow companion drops readily into the hand with the slightest shake. Rest assured that love for the things of this life and cleaving to this present state are sure indications of immaturity in the divine life.

Conclusions:

- **Even if we had any great accomplishments, they could never match what Christ has done for us.** Human achievements, no matter how impressive, cannot earn us salvation and eternal life. Paul had impressive credentials. He had the upbringing, nationality, family background, inheritance, orthodoxy, involvements, and morality to qualify him for great respect. But when he was converted to faith in Christ, everything changed for him. Paul did not depend on his accomplishments or qualifications to please God because even the most impressive accomplishments fall short of God's holy standards.
- What are you depending on to put you in right standing before God?
 - Are you depending on Christian parents, church affiliation, or just being good to make you right with God?
 - Do you think because you are not as bad as that creeper down the street or the loser that you work with that God is probably OK with you?
 - What else – other than Jesus? It needs to be Jesus alone – what He did for us on the cross and what He wants to do in our lives right now – that is all we can depend on.
- **Our most important goal should be getting to know Christ better.** Paul wants to know Christ, to be like Christ, and to be all Christ has in mind for him. We must lay aside everything harmful and forsake anything that may distract us from being totally devoted Christians. (See *Handbook of Bible Application*)
- **Knowing Christ is not just a one-time conversion experience.** It is an ongoing relationship that keeps getting deeper and growing stronger as we draw closer and closer to Him.
- Christian philosopher J.P. Moreland has put it like this:
“Being a Christian was never meant to be a separate compartment added to an otherwise secular life. Rather, being a Christian is a way of being present in the world, and it informs, permeates, and shapes every aspect of one’s thinking, feeling and acting. Throughout it all, being enraptured with Jesus himself is the central core to growing as his follower...”

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