

IS IT WORTH IT?
PHILIPPIANS 3:7-11

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

According to NBC News the death toll from the corona virus in the US officially reached one million on May 4. As we are finally emerging from the worst ravages of this pandemic, judgments are being made about how we have done in dealing with this disease. Americans have made a lot of sacrifices in dealing with Covid. Were they worth it?

I suspect that most of us would recognize that the results have been mixed. When the virus first struck, lots of things were shut down--- businesses, travel, sports, schools, even church services. Initially medical people were not quite sure what we were dealing with and how to handle it. So perhaps we have to cut them a little slack for their initial response and their advice to political leaders.

Certainly doctors and nurses and hospital staff have made many sacrifices in the course of this pandemic. At times they were dealing with burnout. Some of them contracted the disease and died. Was it worth it for them? Committed medical professionals, for the most part, would say that this was their job. This was their calling. They did what needed to be done.

Was the shutdown of the economy worth it? Thousands of businesses went under in the last couple of years. Millions of workers lost their jobs. Was that worth it? Probably we would have mixed responses to that.

Senior citizens and residents of nursing homes were the hardest hit by Covid. Was the shut down of access to these facilities worth the sacrifice? Probably it had to be done to protect these vulnerable people. But certainly there was a cost for the sacrifice involved. They were largely cut off from their loved ones. There was an emotional toll involved in that restricted access.

Hospitals likewise shut down access to visitors. It was something like two years that I could not do hospital visitations. One of the sad things about that was that some of these sick people were without their loved ones. Sometimes people died without family members at their side.

Then there were schools which were shut down. Kids and their parents made sacrifices to figure out how to do virtual learning. Was all of that worth the cost? In the light of recent research a lot of people have doubts about that. We maintained an alternative school here on our campus for about a year. To the best of our knowledge none of the kids ever came down with Covid, and none of the teachers did. Meanwhile the education researchers say that a lot of kids have lost academic progress. Psychologists

have noted that there have been significant mental health problems for kids who had to stay at home. There has been a concerning rise in suicide rates among our kids.

Then we taxpayers have been on the hook for trillions of dollars that were appropriated to sustain our economy and our vulnerable workers and businesses. Was that worth it? Most of us would probably say that these initial appropriations were necessary. But it seems clear that more recent outlays of additional billions and trillions of federal dollars have contributed to our surge of inflation.

Just living life requires certain sacrifices. But the thoughtful person will at least occasionally ponder whether sacrifices are worth the cost involved. Jesus told the people who were attracted to Him that they needed to count the cost before they decided to follow Him. In the Gospel of Luke we are told that there were large crowds following Him. (PROJECTOR ON--- LUKE 14:27) In Luke #14 v. 27 He told them, **“Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.”** First century people who lived in the Roman Empire would have recognized that this was a reference to the Roman punishment of crucifixion. In the next verse (LUKE 14:28) Jesus added, **“For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?”**

The people in the church at Philippi in Greece (PHILIPPI ROME MAP) found out quickly that there was a cost involved in becoming a follower of Jesus. The Book of Philippians indicates that they were being persecuted for their faith. Some of them had probably lost jobs, some had been rejected by family and friends, and some were being harassed by the local government. If there was anyone who was qualified to help them answer the question “Is it worth it?”, it was the one who was largely responsible for starting the church there. It was the Apostle Paul.

He knew as well as anyone what it was like to make sacrifices for the cause of Christ. He was writing to the Philippians as a prisoner in Rome awaiting trial to determine if he would be executed for his preaching of the gospel. In vv. 7-11 of Philippians #3 he talks about the cost involved in following Christ, and he answers the question “Is it worth it?” It is a good thing for everyone, Christians included, to pause from time to time to consider whether the direction which we have chosen in life is worth the cost involved. We are going to do that this morning as we look at Paul’s consideration of the costs and rewards which come from following Jesus.

I.

First, in vv. 7-9 of #3 the Apostle Paul speaks of THE LOSSES FROM KNOWING CHRIST. (I. THE LOSSES FROM KNOWING CHRIST) He uses the language of an accountant in our passage. He speaks of gains and losses, assets and liabilities. In the first three verses he identifies three things which he gave up in becoming a Christian.

A.

In v. 7 the apostle speaks of RELIGIOUS ACCOMPLISHMENTS. (I. THE LOSSES... A. RELIGIOUS ACCOMPLISHMENTS) He writes, **“But whatever gain I had, I counted**

as loss for the sake of Christ..." Two weeks ago in vv. 5 & 6 we saw the apostle describe his religious accomplishments. The first four things on his list were products of his birth. The last three items were results of choice and personal effort. Paul in these last three items noted that he was a Pharisee--- a religious conservative, a persecutor of the church, and one who was blameless according to the Pharisaic understanding of Hebrew law. The guy was a rising star in Judaism. He was headed toward the top of the religious establishment. He had already made significant religious accomplishments.

In becoming a Christian Paul gave up these accomplishments. He renounced his Pharisaism, which incurred the wrath of his former religious colleagues. He became a member of the church, which he had formerly persecuted. He also gave up his pursuit of the Old Testament law as it was understood by the Pharisees. He continued to appreciate his status as a Jew, but he no longer regarded it as providing him with special merit before God.

Paul sacrificed these religious accomplishments in becoming a Christian. His religious background was useful in his new role as a Christian leader, but his conversion incurred the hatred of those whose favor and respect he once had sought. Most of his former friends and colleagues now regarded him as an enemy. So there was a genuine loss that resulted from his knowledge of Christ.

B.

We are going to skip to v. 9 where Paul speaks of a second loss from knowing Christ. He refers there to **EARNED RIGHTEOUSNESS**. (I. A. B. **EARNED RIGHTEOUSNESS**) He speaks of "**a righteousness of my own that comes from the law.**" Prior to his conversion Paul sought to follow the Law of Moses and the Pharisaic interpretation of it. In the eyes of his fellow Jews he was successful in doing that. He lived up to what they understood to be the requirements for one to be holy and worthy in the sight of God. He had studied the Bible diligently. He was thoroughly versed in the teaching of the rabbis. He fasted twice a week. He carefully observed the Sabbath and other holy days. He was as kosher as anybody could get.

Paul had an earned righteousness which won the approval of Jewish leaders. But he gave that up for the sake of gaining the righteousness which God required. Some people today follow an approach toward God similar to the approach which Paul once had. They are religious people. They live pretty moral lives. They go to church. They give to charitable causes. They have the respect of their peers in the community. But it is a righteousness based upon their works and efforts. God has a problem with that.

C.

There was a third loss that Paul experienced which resulted from his personal relationship with Christ. Besides the sacrifice of his religious accomplishments and his earned righteousness, he speaks in v. 8 of the **LOSS OF ALL THINGS**. (I. A. B. C. **LOSS OF ALL THINGS**) Since he also speaks about the loss of religious accomplishments and the loss of earned righteousness, what does he have in mind by the term "all things?"

The facts that Paul was a Roman citizen and that he had studied under the famous rabbi Gamaliel meant that he probably came from a family that was well off financially. It took money to get an education like Paul had. Scholarships and government guaranteed loans had not yet been invented. His family probably had hopes that he would become a respected rabbi. Paul instead chose to become a wandering evangelist for this new religious group. We don't know how his family responded to that. Maybe he lost an inheritance and family support. Certainly he lost friends and social position, and he had a lower standard of living.

D.

Consider for a moment letter D in the outline OUR LOSSES. (I. A. B. C. D. OUR LOSSES) There is a cost for us that comes from following Jesus. For some of us it may mean a lower standard of living. A famous sociologist by the name of Max Weber once argued that capitalism gained an economic foothold in the West because Biblical values of honesty and hard work and saving became predominant in Europe and America. More recently a scholar by the name of Rodney Stark wrote a book entitled *The Victory of Reason* in which he adds to the notion that Christianity has been central to the economic progress in the West.

So living as a Christian does not necessarily mean a lower standard of living. God often blesses Christians with material wealth. The Book of Proverbs promotes principles of hard work and saving which, when followed, tend to lead to prosperity.

But a commitment to Christ also means that our career or our job or our business should not be the primary thing for which we live. There are other priorities that we should have in life. So being a Christian may mean that we don't rise to the top of the corporate ladder like others do who are willing to sacrifice anything to get there. We are not, or should not, be willing to sacrifice our families or our integrity. A commitment to Christ means that we don't regard money as the primary criterion for success in life.

R. G. LeTourneau (R. G. LETOURNEAU) was the inventor and developer of 70% of the earth moving equipment which was used by the Allies during World War II. He was also a committed Christian. Early in his career he went into partnership with a fellow church member on a road construction job. The project ran into problems, and the partner complained that too many of LeTourneau's relatives were on the payroll. So LeTourneau put all but one of his relatives to work on another project for which he won a bid on his own without the involvement of his partner. That project was very successful. It looked like he and his partner were going to lose a lot of money on their joint project. But a landslide one night proved to be a blessing to their joint project in that it moved a lot of dirt that needed to be moved.

When the time came to split the profits, LeTourneau's partner complained that Letourneau had made a big profit on his project. So the partner said that he should have all of the profits on their joint project, especially since Letourneau had sent off some of his crew to the other project. The partner, of course, had demanded that these others

be laid off. LeTourneau's lawyers told him that the partner did not have a legal leg to stand on. But since the partner was a Christian and a fellow church member, LeTourneau decided that he would obey the Biblical injunction from 1 Corinthians #6 not to take a fellow Christian to court. So he let his partner have all of the profits. He suffered a financial loss at the hands of a Christian who did not act like a Christian. A couple of years later, though, the former partner went bankrupt. LeTourneau's business continued to flourish. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Following Jesus also means that we might experience rejection by our family and friends. It may mean that we give up certain habits or pastimes that we once enjoyed. In some parts of the world conversion to Christ means serious persecution.

Bill Borden (WILLIAM BORDEN) was the son of the wealthy owners of the Borden Company. He became a Christian as a young person. In 1904 at age 16 his parents gave him a high school graduation present of a trip around the world. During that trip he determined that he was going to be a missionary. At that time he wrote two words in the back of his Bible: "No reserves."

At the beginning of his freshman year at Yale, he met with one other student for prayer before breakfast. By the end of his freshman year, largely through his influence, 150 freshmen were meeting weekly for prayer and Bible study. By his senior year 1000 of the 1300 students at Yale were involved in some kind of Bible study. In his senior year Bill Borden was also president of Phi Beta Kappa. So he was a really smart guy. Big job offers poured in. His parents wanted him in their family business. But Bill determined to go to seminary at Princeton. At this time he wrote another phrase in the back of his Bible: "No retreats."

After seminary he headed off to Egypt to study Arabic. About this time he wrote in the back of his Bible: "No regrets." He arrived in Cairo in December of 1912. Bill Borden could have afforded to buy a car, but he called that option "an unjustifiable luxury." He was in Cairo for only a month when he contracted spinal meningitis. He died shortly afterward.

Was commitment to Jesus worth it for Bill Borden? (NO RESERVES...) His testimony was that it was worth it. A biography of his life written soon after his passing proved to be an inspiration to scores, and perhaps hundreds, of young Christians who decided to become missionaries.

The Apostle Paul eventually sacrificed his life for the same cause. In our passage he was considering the things that he had already given up. What did he think of the losses which he suffered for the sake of Christ? (PROJECTOR OFF) At the end of v. 8 he says, "[I] **count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.**" Paul already had Christ by virtue of the fact that he was a Christian. But he was still growing in his relationship with Him. Through his struggles and sacrifices and obedience he was coming to know Him better and to develop more of Christ's character in his life.

The word for “rubbish” was used by the Greeks of human waste and of the leftover scraps from meals, which were thrown out for the dogs. Back in v. 2 he called his Jewish opponents “dogs.” In the eyes of the world what Paul gave up in his pursuit of Jesus was considerable. To the unbelieving Jews Paul had become a fool. From the perspective of Paul what he had sacrificed was rubbish.

II.

Whatever things that Paul and Bill Borden and R. G. LeTourneau had sacrificed were far outweighed by the gains which came from being a follower of Christ. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. THE GAINS FROM KNOWING CHRIST) Thus vv. 9-11 of our passage describe THE GAINS FROM KNOWING CHRIST.

A.

First on Paul’s list was THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD. (II. THE GAINS... A. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD) Beginning in the last part of v. 8 he writes, “**...I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith...**”

As a Jew schooled in the Hebrew Bible, Paul knew about the significance of sin. He knew that sin produced separation from God and death. But he thought that the sin problem could be dealt with by observance of the law--- the “righteousness of my own.” If a Jew worked hard enough, he could gain acceptance from God.

That was not really what the Old Testament taught. The prophet Habakkuk (HABAKKUK 2:4) said, “**...the righteous shall live by his faith.**” Paul learned that from his conversion experience. The theological term which describes this is “justification.” (ROMANS 5:1) In Romans #5 v. 1 Paul wrote, “**Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.**” To be justified means to be declared righteous. When we trust in Jesus, God declares us to be righteous. The sacrifice of Christ is credited to our account. Paul regarded this righteousness as great gain. It meant that he did not have to bear the penalty for his own sin. This gift of righteousness from God meant that sinners could go to heaven by trusting in Jesus.

B.

The second gain that came from knowing Christ for Paul was PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST. (II. A. B. PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST) In v. 10 he speaks of his desire to know Him. In Greek there were two words for “know.” One word tended to have a nuance of intellectual knowledge, in the way that we might all say that we know Joe Biden. The other word for knowledge had a nuance of knowledge by experience or relationship. In this sense only a friend or relative could say that he or she knows Joe Biden. It is this word for experiential knowledge that is used here.

In becoming a Christian Paul came to really know Christ. That knowledge grew as he got to know Him even better. To a Jew who had been raised in a religious tradition that tended to regard God as somewhat remote and distant and that rarely referred to Him in terms of a father, that personal knowledge and relationship with the Son of God was great gain.

1.

Verse 10 indicates that this personal knowledge of the Son of God involves three things (II. B. PERSONAL...1. POWER OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION) First, it involves the POWER OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION. That same power which had raised Christ from the dead was at work in Paul. He had experienced that power in healing the sick, in casting out demons, and, in at least one incident, raising someone else from the dead. He experienced that power in his preaching when he saw scores of people respond to the gospel. Jesus promised this evangelistic power to His followers at the beginning of the Book of Acts (Acts 1:8).

2.

This personal knowledge of the Son of God also involves PARTICIPATION IN THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST. (II. B. 1. 2. PARTICIPATION IN THE...) In v. 10 he calls it sharing his sufferings. Somehow he saw suffering for Jesus as a privilege. Back in v. 29 of # 1 he said, **"For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake..."**

In Acts #5 Peter and the other apostles were beaten upon orders of the Sanhedrin for preaching about Jesus. (ACTS 5:41) The text says that after this beating, **"Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name."**

The value to Paul and to us for this kind of suffering comes from knowing that we are doing it in behalf of, and for the sake of, the One who died for us. When we get picked on for acting like Christians, there is joy that can come to us from the knowledge that we are serving the living God. The Lord Jesus sees and knows and has experienced even worse things for us.

In Matthew #5 v. 11 (MATTHEW 5:11) Jesus told his followers, **"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account."** In the next verse (MATTHEW 5:12) He adds, **"Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."**

3.

Thirdly, personal knowledge of the Son of God also means, according to v. 10, BECOMING LIKE CHRIST IN HIS DEATH. (II. B. 3. BECOMING LIKE CHRIST IN HIS DEATH) The verb that is used in this verse means **"to be conformed inwardly in one's experience to something."** Paul does not mean that he wants to die. He seems to be speaking about Jesus' death as the central event of Christianity. The apostle

desires to be brought into line with the significance of Jesus' death. He desires to acquire the same kind of self-sacrificial spirit, the same kind of devotion to the will of God, the same kind of deep love for other people which are reflected in the death of Jesus for humanity. To become more Christ-like in this way was great gain.

C.

So there is gain in following Jesus which comes from reception of God's righteousness, from intimate knowledge of Christ, and, thirdly, from the PROMISE OF RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD. (II. A. B. C. PROMISE OF RESURRECTION...)

This is mentioned in v. 11 . Paul finishes his sentence by saying, **“that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”** We could get the impression from the way in which the sentence is worded that Paul has some doubt about whether he will participate in this resurrection. But earlier in Philippians we saw that he had no doubt about where he was going when he died. There are different interpretations of this clause, but it may be that he was uncertain about whether Jesus would come back to earth before he died.

The expression that Paul uses here literally means “out-resurrection from the dead ones.” He may be describing a resurrection in which only some rise from the dead. This is what is commonly referred to as the rapture of the church. If Paul is still alive when Jesus returns to earth at the rapture, he won't need to be raised from the dead. The confident hope that he is able to have about the future--- whether he enters it through the rapture or through resurrection--- enables him to add another blessing to the profit column as great gain. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Is it worth it to follow Christ? Paul says that it is. Bill Borden says that it is. The three phrases that he left in the back of his Bible give testimony to that conviction: No reserves; no retreats; no regrets. The losses involved in following Jesus become insignificant in comparison to the joy that we can have from a relationship with Him.

What is keeping you today from knowing Christ? Is it your good works? Is it your own independence? Is it money or your job or someone in your life? The losses involved in knowing Christ do not compare with the gains which come from knowing Jesus. You need to trust Him as your Savior. You need to accept Him into your life simply by putting your faith in Him for forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

What is it that is holding us Christians back from a closer walk with the Lord? Is it fear? Is it uncertainty about what He might do with our lives? Is it our career? Is it love of money? Is it simply laziness? It is worth it to follow Jesus.

Margaret Hayes was born and raised in Great Britain. She lived through World War II in London and trained as a nurse in a bombed out London hospital. After the war she went to the Belgian Congo as a missionary with Unevangelized Fields Mission. In 1962 she was sent to a remote mission station to do medical work. In 1964 there was a rebellion in the Congo. The rebels vented much of their wrath on Westerners. Many Europeans and Americans were killed.

In August of 1964 the rebels went to Margaret's mission station and took her and another missionary to their camp. There the missionaries joined other westerners who were being held prisoners. Ten days later Margaret was allowed to return to her nursing work at the missions station. But the day after that the national army recaptured the major city held by rebels in that region. The rebels proceeded to kill the fifteen missionaries and family members whom Margaret had just left behind.

When the Congolese at the mission station heard about the massacre, they decided to hide Margaret in the rain forest. The rebels tried to find her, but they could not. Finally the rebels issued an ultimatum: Either the white woman would be surrendered to them, or the whole Christian church would be executed. When Margaret heard about this, she decided to give herself up. On Christmas Eve in 1964 she went back to the rebels.

They did not kill her, probably because they needed her medical expertise. She was taken to a Roman Catholic convent where 31 priests, 15 nuns, and a Belgian woman and her two children were also imprisoned. By this time most people assumed that Margaret was dead. But somehow she managed to smuggle out several letters. One of them made reference to her fortieth birthday.

In one of the letters she wrote, **“The sisters presented me with a magnificent bouquet at breakfast, plus a birthday card and a present. You’d never think we were prisoners-of-war! Several priests came over and gave their greetings, too. Truly the fellowship of suffering is a very precious fellowship, for it sweeps away all barriers of language, color and creed. Philippians 3:10 reveals the wish that we may be in fellowship with the sufferings of the Lord, but what He allows us to suffer is nothing to what He bore for us; even so, it is a privilege to have been allowed to go through these difficult days, for He has become so very much more precious; sometimes it is necessary for Him to remove all human props that we may better lean on Him who alone is able to support us at these times.”**

In May 1965 government forces headed for the convent. When word of that advance came, all 31 priests were killed. The rebels retreated to another location with the remaining women and children. A month later a captured rebel was forced to lead the government forces to the rebel hideout. The troops were warned by their commander not to shoot too soon lest the prisoners be killed. A few days later Margaret was laying in her hut when suddenly she saw army troops running toward her. Gunfire broke out. In two minutes it was all over. Margaret and the other remaining captives were rescued unharmed.

Is it worth it to follow Christ? For the sake of following Christ, will you stop making your career or money or fame or revenge or a hobby your top priority in life? Will you give of your money to Christian causes as though you believe that Christ is Lord? Will you make your family a Biblical priority? Will you speak of Jesus to a friend at school or at work--- at the risk of being ridiculed? Will you consider a service opportunity? Jenny has reminded us that we will need lots of volunteers for Vacation Bible School next month.

The Barths have pointed out that we are going to need additional volunteers this fall for our Good News Club that meets in the elementary school. I talked to the activities directors recently at the hospital and at Mountain View Nursing Home. They would like people to lead a worship service for their residents on Saturdays. Would any of you be willing to help out? I plan to challenge my fellow pastors in town at our monthly meeting this week to have them or their church consider taking one Saturday a month.

“But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”