

Who you Know Philippians ch3

There's a popular saying that when you want to get ahead in life 'it's not *what* you know but *who* you know'. Qualifications on your CV will get you an interview but a positive reference from someone in authority who *knows* you will count for so much more.

The same is true when we think of the life to come. Information alone has limited value. What counts is knowing the One Who can secure us a place in heaven and the coming resurrection. The Apostle Paul writes, 'I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.' (Philippians 3 v 10-11)

During lockdown we've been learning a lot about what is essential and what we can do without. Here is what matters the most, knowing Jesus!

People are always trying to tell us what is important. 'Believe in yourself. Follow this diet or exercise regime. Fight against global warming. Be kind, especially to animals.' These slogans and ideas seem to suggest this is how we may find purpose and happiness in life. Commendable as some of them may be they are in fact so limited!

None of these can make up for the wrong we've done or take away a guilty conscience. None of them can give us a good and righteous status before our Maker and Judge. None of them can assure us of peace and safety beyond death. That's why we need to know the One Who can.

Paul was writing to his old congregation in Philippi during the 1st century where some people were insisting certain Jewish traditions and rituals like circumcision were vitally important for being in good standing with God. Nonsense! says Paul. I had all those things. I epitomised them, embodied them, lived them 24/7 but listen, compared to the blessed assurance I feel now through knowing Jesus those things seem like rubbish! All of those things were just little me trying to impress God with an outer appearance of goodness.

Not so different perhaps from people nowadays trying to justify ourselves as good and nice citizens and impress others with fine-sounding posts on social media!

Since meeting Christ personally, Paul now realises the limitations of everything else and the precious, truly vital forgiveness, righteous covering, reconciliation with God and all powerful help from the Holy Spirit that come only through Jesus.

So what does it mean, to 'know Christ'?

Paul mentions faith here, we must believe, we must trust in Jesus. Specifically - acknowledging and turning from our sin, we must depend on the atonement Jesus made when He suffered on our behalf on the cross. What counts is not what we try and do to fix ourselves but what Jesus has done to save and renew us.

Now many people in Ireland and elsewhere profess to have faith, they have a nominal connection to the Christian religion, they were 'christened' and maybe 'confirmed' but you know as well as I do that some of the biggest rogues in the country were christened and confirmed! There's obviously more to faith than outward rituals.

For Paul, faith in Christ meant the deepest personal commitment that followed through with a life of ongoing trust and obedience and service. Having come to know Jesus as his Messiah Saviour, Paul wanted to continue the relationship, following Jesus as his Mentor, Master, Lord. He writes here of 'pressing on' in this path of discipleship, even if it means he has to undergo some of the same kind of rejection and suffering experienced by his Lord. He is confident that this is the road to heaven and eternal life!

He has lost everything in terms of worldly wealth, comfort, social position, prestige, all the things he had as a young man. He has been lynched, beaten, falsely accused and imprisoned. He has known homelessness and hunger, hardship and sacrifice since deciding to trust and identify himself with Jesus yet what do we find? Far from being bitter or resentful his letter resonates with joy! His tone is positive, his life is marked with purpose, courage and anticipation of greater things to come.

How? Why? Because he is no longer trusting in the limited messages of worldly ideas and religions. He is focussed on knowing Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God and Saviour of the world. He is assured of citizenship in heaven. His goal is to know and serve the Lord with increasing conviction until he dies or Christ returns. Either way means resurrection and an eternity of knowing face to face the One Who first loved us and gave Himself for us.

Think of it like this. You may know someone famous. You may have friends who are politicians or celebrities, even royalty. That's nice, but with respect none of them can give you salvation or joy like this.

Let's make it our heart's desire to know Jesus, Whom to know is 'life indeed'!

Amen