

## Philippians Chapter 3- John Karmelich

1. How do we have joy when other people want us to be miserable? To answer that, let me back up and quickly review Philippians to date. Chapter 1 focused on how to be full of joy despite any or all external-circumstances. Chapter 2 focused on our internal attitude that leads us to a joyful life. If we can have joy in any circumstance by living a God centered life, how do we deal with people who want to destroy our joy? For example, how do we deal with those who say, you can only be right with God if you do A, B, and C? What about negative people who can't be joyful no matter what we do? How do we deal with people who always want to put us down no matter what we say? Yes, this chapter deals with these issues. Now there's an optimistic way to open a lesson!
  - a) I don't know about you, but I'm getting miserable just thinking about this stuff. Paul lived in a world where religious Jewish people added a big bunch of rules over and above what the bible teaches. For example, God said we should rest on the seventh day. When I think of rest, it's just that, I don't work. I do church and relax the rest of the day. Devout Jewish men wrote what an "encyclopedia" of "do's and don'ts" on interpreting God's laws. Many of those rules are an interpretation of what they consider rest from one's normal activities. Even though Paul is writing to a non-Jewish church, the those Christians could think if we are worshipping a Jewish God, maybe we must follow their encyclopedia of rules. Paul is going to explain to us what we should be doing and not be doing in order to live as God is expecting us to live.
  - b) The reason why Paul goes into all of this is he wants Christians to be joyful. We're now in the third chapter (yes the chapter breaks were added a millennium after it was written). A big purpose for this letter is Paul wanted to teach Christians how to be joyful, living as He wants us to live. Chapter 1 focused on our external issues that affect our joy, Chapter 2 on internal issues, and Chapter 3 will now focus on those who want to take away our joy. It's a wonderful twenty-one-verse section that expresses what is and isn't important on living as to live as God wants us to live.
  - c) OK then, with that speech out of my system, time for specifics:
2. Chapter 3 starts by Paul telling the Christians in Philippi to be joyful through God's power. Then he says he's repeating what he stated earlier. What I think he meant was, Chapter 1 covered those external issues that keep us from having joy with God. In effect, Paul's going to teach a tangent of what he taught in Chapter 1. That chapter focused on external issues that prevent us from having peace with God. Chapter 3 takes it one step further to say, "What about all those people who are going out of their way to make us miserable?" (He doesn't say it that literally, but in effect, that is what he's talking about in this chapter!)
  - a) Paul uses negative illustrations to describe people who effectively want us to be miserable as they are miserable. Paul calls them dogs (as in vicious street dogs), evildoers, and those who harm themselves to prove their worth to God. The underlying point is we can never put any confidence in what we do "in the flesh" in order to earn God's respect. By the way that will lead to whole discussion of why we obey God's laws in the first place. My short version is simply that God tells us to live "that way" as it's the best way to live. Rules that people make over and above those rules only get us into trouble. Yes I'm going to spend a lot of time explaining the difference in this lesson. My goal isn't to bore you to death. It is just to get you to understand the difference between God's rules and man's rules as where we should "draw the line" in understanding both.
  - b) From there, Paul gives his "pre-Jesus" resume as if to say, "Let me show you someone who went way out of his way to try to prove his worth to God." Paul's pre-Jesus resume cannot be topped in terms of devotion! Then he gives us the punch line that says in effect, "None of that matters in comparison to what Jesus did for me!" That's why His laws versus rules made by people is a major issue and is worth taking the time to understand the difference.

- c) Since Paul walked away from what he accomplished in his life prior to believing he's now saved strictly by trusting in what Jesus did, and now that he's lived that life for around 30 years, it's time for Paul to give his own "now what". The point is Paul wants to remind us of how God expects us to live for Him since we can't earn our salvation.
  - d) I would describe Paul's "now what" is his desire to keep moving forward. It's as if he says I know I did this and that for Jesus, but until God says, my life's over, there's nothing I can do but keep moving forward. Remember Paul dictated this letter while being chained to a pair of Roman soldiers. It tells you that he was optimistic he'd live past his current trial. It is a matter of believing whether he lives or dies, he got the fact that his goal was to use his life to make a difference for Jesus until God says otherwise.
  - e) In that sense, Paul explains to us how we're to live by God's rules and not man's rules. It's a matter of reading the bible, making the best decisions we can under through it's laws on how God wants us to live. If the goal is to live, as God desires we live, it means we would not for example, steal or murder as that would be displeasing to God, let alone get us into trouble with the law.
  - f) The point as it relates to the text is Paul's saying, "All those other things I've accomplished in my life before I gave my life to Jesus? Who cares?" Paul's saying he's in good standing with God not based on all the churches he started, but simply because he had faith in who Jesus is, was and will be.
  - g) Paul wraps up this section by effectively saying, "Join me". That doesn't mean he wants us to get arrested and preach Jesus from a jail cell. He means he wants us to see that our lives outside of living for Jesus as a "waste of a life". He's saying the best way to be joyful all the time no matter the circumstances or who we're dealing with, is to realize that God created us for the purpose of worshipping Him. Yes, using our lives to make a difference for Him is part of that worship. It's about having a joyful attitude even if others are being negative around us. It's about the realization that all we accomplish in life outside of living to make a difference for Jesus will not eternally matter. For example, we may learn an occupation. It may make a difference as far as our income. Our occupation may lead us to be a witness to other people. I'm not saying doing other things isn't important. I'm saying that life can be seen in terms of "Is it (or can it) make a difference for Jesus", as that's what's eternal!
  - h) There, now that I'm more optimistic by getting my focus right, I'm ready for the verse-by-verse commentary on Chapter 3. Let's begin:
3. Chapter 3, Verse 1: Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.
- a) Since the chapter breaks were not added for a millennium after Paul wrote this, lets recall what's the "Further" is Paul is referring to: The last subject was about the man who Paul is sending to deliver this letter. His name is Epaphroditus. He's from Philippi and delivered a financial gift from the Philippians to Paul. Now he's anxious to go back home to tell that church how Paul's doing. Now that Paul got his comments about Epaphroditus out of his system, he wants to get back to the main topic of letter, which is about how to have joy no matter what's going on, on the inside, outside, or even if people want to bring us down. It is why Paul starts this section with "rejoice in the Lord".
    - i) Remember that Paul is in prison, dictating this letter while he is literally chained to two guards. He's saying in effect, "despite my circumstances, I'm full of joy and it's my desire to see all Christians have that same type of joy".
    - ii) So what does it mean practically to be joyful all the time? What if I'm in pain at the moment? Do I still have to be jumping up and down with joy? This isn't about our circumstances. It's about putting the pain or whatever we're dealing with now in a perspective of all of eternity. It's like saying, "What's the worse that can happen to me? If I die, I'd be with Jesus. If I live, that gives me more opportunities to use my time as witness for Him". That's why Paul calls it a "safeguard", as in we can't lose!

- b) OK then, now that I'm in a good mood, let's look at the rest of the verse. Paul says that it's no trouble to say this again. While we're not positive what that meant, recall that Chapter One focused on external issues that keep us from enjoying a close relationship with Jesus. While that chapter focused on whatever is our current situation, this chapter will focus on dealing with people who specifically want to take away that joy. He's thinking of those he called "Judaizers", which refers to Christians who converted from Judaism, who insist that Christians keep all the Old Testament laws in order to be saved. I'll explain what it means in greater detail after I talk about Verse 2. Speaking of which:
4. Verse 2: Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. <sup>3</sup>For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh— <sup>4</sup>though I myself have reasons for such confidence.
- a) Let me start by discussing "dogs". We're not talking about household pets, but wild dogs that roamed the streets looking for food. Paul is comparing those Judaizers to those types of dogs as Paul saw both of them as a danger to our happiness. Yes I'll explain why that is so in a second. First let me explain Paul's other two colorful adjectives.
- b) The next one is "evildoers". Most of us think of evil as maybe someone who is responsible for the death of millions or maybe someone who is a lifelong thief. When Paul thinks of an evildoer, in his mind, it's anyone and everyone who's using their life to oppose God's will for the world. In other words, God's will is for us to use our lives to glorify Him as we put the needs of others as priority over our own needs. It's about drawing upon His power to use our lives to make a difference for Him. People who think, "God's not pleasing with us unless we first do A, B, and C" is an example of an evildoer, because thinking that way is opposing God's love for us as we are. We obey Him out of gratitude, not to earn His love.
- c) The final key term is "mutilators of the flesh". A requirement for Judaism is to have one's foreskin surgically removed from the penis. It's required to be done on the eighth day of a boy's the life no matter what day of the week that falls on. It's associated with Judaism as a sign that one is living differently for God. Right after that, Paul says that those who are really circumcised are people who trust in Jesus not only for their salvation, but also trust in God's Spirit to guide our lives to make a difference for Him.
- i) Think of it this way: If a baby is circumcised and grows up to be an evil man who kills people, that physical act of circumcision is going to be meaningless when the time comes for God's judgment. That's why Paul's key point here is how we act is far more important than any physical act performed on us as a baby.
- d) Let's back up and remember what the issue is. The issue is trying to prove our worth to God by how we live. The appeal of Judaism is we think God must be pleased with us by the way we live. It's really easy for Christians to think, "God must really love me now as I'm doing this or that for Him". The truth is He doesn't love us any more or less when we are doing good or bad things. Yes God wants us to do good things, but not to earn points with Him, but simply because that's the best way to live our lives. Consider why God did create us in the first place? What's in it for Him? The answer is He's so full of love it's His desire to create something to express than love upon. What that means for us is He made us to glorify Him. We don't do that by trying to prove our worth to Him, we glorify Him by using our lives to make a difference for Him.
- i) To put it another way, God is perfect by definition. We can never be good enough to be perfect. Therefore, we need to stop trying to be perfect! That never means to avoid doing the right thing. It simply means we can't earn His love by doing those good things. We should do them to bring joy to our lives. We should do them as it is how God wants us to live. However, we can't prove our worth to Him by doing all of those things. God knows we're sinners by nature. He does want us to live as best we can as that's the best way to live life. Since none of us can ever be perfect, I would argue that trying to prove our worth to Him is a waste of time!

- e) All of that is going to lead to Paul's discussion of, "You think you tried hard to prove your worth to God? Let me tell you my story!" From Verse 4 through Verse 6 Paul tells us how he lived prior to his Christian conversion. It's his way of saying, if we can make God love us based on our background, upbringing or effort, I should win that prize, since I devoted my life to living that way. I know now it's rubbish, but it took time and Jesus coming into my life to figure that out. Let me explain what a waste of time all of that was, so hopefully we can all learn from his mistakes. That way we don't repeat them in our lives. OK, then here goes:
5. Verse 4, (cont.): If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup> circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.
- a) I'm painfully aware that the best way to learn in life, is to "fall down" and realize what we have done wrong by our mistakes. However, once in awhile, we can learn from others so as to not have to learn the hard way. That's what Paul's plea is in these verses. He's trying to teach us, "Don't make the same mistake I made by trying to please God by effort". Here is my pre-Christian resume with the key point being that all of "that" is a waste of time. I'd love you to keep that mind as we study these verses. OK, then, let's begin.
- b) Paul like a good Jewish child, was circumcised on the eighth day of his life. I'm sure Paul's parents probably prayed that he grew up to be a good Jewish man, who'd follow all of the Old Testament laws all his life. However, anyone can be circumcised, so the next thing he brings up is the fact that he was raised a devout Jewish person. He was born in a city that today is in Turkey. His point is despite his foreign hometown, he was raised with a strict Jewish background and he never turned from that background.
- c) Before the year 70AD, any Jewish person could verify which of the 12 tribes of Israel they came from by going to the Jewish temple and tracing back their family line. In that year, the Romans destroyed the temple and all those family records. My point is Paul knew of his family heritage and was a fact that could be verified when he wrote this about 60AD. If you don't know "Benjamin" was one of the 12 tribes of Israel. The point here is simply that Paul was Jewish and could prove his lineage at the time this was written.
- d) As we all know, being Jewish is both a cultural background and a religion. Now that Paul stated his cultural ties to Judaism, next he's going to focus on his religious background. It is time for one of my "research" comments: About that time a Jewish historian (Josephus) wrote a book on the Roman conquest and destruction of Israel. My simple point is that he claimed over a million Jewish people were killed in that 70AD war. My research also told me that the number of Pharisee's were around 6,000. When you read about the Pharisee's that lived during Jesus' day, realize they were only a small percentage of that population. The non-Pharisee's thought of them as the "religious of the religious". Even if my numbers are off by a bit, I'm willing to bet that the number of Pharisee's were a small percentage of the population as it was difficult to live that way. Anyway, the point is Paul was a part of that small group who lived that way.
- e) Next, let me discuss "zeal". As we all know, we can have zeal for an idea or project and be sincerely wrong about our beliefs. Assuming one is not say killing someone, zeal can be a good thing as it means we have a heart to do some sort of project. Paul having zeal as one who was a religious Jew was one who put his heart and soul into that belief.
- f) Speaking of having zeal to do the wrong thing, notice that Paul would literally persecute Christians to death. It's interesting to consider that Judaism obviously considers murder to be wrong. It's one thing to debate about one's view on something. It's another to want to put them to death for their views. That's zeal. It may help to remember that the Jewish leaders were "profiting" off the animal sacrifices at the feasts. The Jewish leadership could not have a bunch of Christians who threatened their profits from their religious system.

- g) Bottom line, is Paul put his heart and soul into his Jewish beliefs even to a point of taking Christians and having them arrested or even killed for that belief. If that wasn't enough to establish his "Jewishness" of that day, the final phrase essentially says he tried as hard as it is possible to keep the law without messing up. He fit the bill of a Pharisee at that time.
  - h) All of that leads to the punch line, which is Verse 7:
6. Verse 7: But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.
- a) There are those who doubt the validity of Paul's conversion. There are some who suggest that because he persecuted people to death, this was a "strange dream" to tackle that guilt. My response is how do you explain those who lead Paul by the hand because he was now blind because of the vision? How do we explain the man who performed a miracle where Paul got his eyesight back? Bottom line, Paul's conversion experience which is detailed in Chapter 13 of the book of Acts, had to be real and had to be a life changing experience.
  - b) Now stop and think, what would it take to change everything you've believed about God for all of your life? Could you change on a dime, or would it take time to digest it? If you study Paul's time carefully, you'd discover there was a three-year time span from when he got converted until he went to Jerusalem to talk to the church leaders. My simple point is I think it took Paul a few years to digest what Jesus did and Paul's view about God.
    - i) A big part of Paul's conversion is it "struck him" that he didn't had to work hard to prove his worth to God. Yes he still needed to work hard to make a difference for Jesus as the rest of his life proved. But the big key of the time Paul grasped is he'll no longer have to work to prove his worth to God. Does that mean everything he did to date was wrong? Of course not. Living by God's rules is how He desires we live. The difference is living by what Jesus did, means we're now depending upon God's power (i.e., the Holy Spirit) to live as God desires as opposed to trying to do it by willpower, which never works in the long run.
    - ii) What Paul considers "a waste of time", is to depend upon his pedigree or his work to prove his worth to God. Now that Paul realized he no longer has to prove that worth, he's free to live to make a difference for God. That's what living for Jesus is all about and how God wants us to live.
    - iii) OK, that point is made. Paul will himself expand on that point in Verses 8-10.
7. Verse 8: What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ<sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.
- a) As I started thinking about this verse, I kept thinking about "everything a loss". Does that refer to our family as well? Of course not. Paul was focusing on his accomplishments and his background. I was thinking of my accomplishments both in the business world and in my personal life. Do I give all that up for Jesus? What we've accomplished makes us what we are. God uses our lives to date and the gifts we have so we can use the rest of our lives to make a difference for Him. God may use us at our work so the skills we have at work is what we can use for Him.
    - i) That leads me back to "everything's loss". Now that I told you what it doesn't refer to, let me tell you what it does. Paul was talking about all the effort he made in his life before Jesus to prove his worth to Him.
    - ii) Now for the tough question: When we're doing a good deed, are we thinking God is impressed with me right now? Let's be honest, God loves us just as much when we sin as when we do the right thing. Of course He doesn't want us to sin, but my point is God doesn't love us less when we do. When we mess up, and we all do, it is a matter of confessing it, turning from it and then doing what's logical next.
    - iii) It's funny to me that Paul considers his life before Jesus to be garbage. I'll explain:

- iv) Obviously Paul can't changed his Jewish heritage. He's not saying he's ashamed of it after he became a Christian. The "garbage" is any and all effort we make to try to prove our worth to God. That's the garbage.
- v) Let me emphasize again, there is nothing wrong with doing good works. The issue isn't what we do. The issue is our motivation to do it. If we are doing a good thing to prove our worth to God, we're blowing it. If we're doing a good thing because it is the right thing to do or because we have a gift to do that thing and we just want to do it, that's proper motivation. For example, I write, not to prove my loyalty to God, but because years of writing reports for work has given me the skills to write so I can make a difference for Him. Yes I need to "slap myself silly" when I think I am something special because of any good work. It also doesn't mean we stop, it's just a matter of checking our motivation.
- b) That leads to the word "righteous". It's the old story of how are we "right" in God's eyes? To state the obvious by now, it's not by trying to prove our worth to Him, but just by us having faith in who Jesus is, and what He's done for us. Once we do that, it's a matter of seeking Him, praying for His guidance and finding ways of doing what we enjoy doing as to make a difference for Him. That's what living the Christian life is all about.
- c) Let me back up for a moment and return to my opening question. How do we deal with people who want to take away our joy? How do we deal with those who think, I can't be pleasing to God unless I do, "A, B, C". Yes you can lecture them on the "Just shall live by Faith" which the New Testament quotes three times (Galatians, Romans and Hebrews). I would say the better way is simply to be joyful around them. We can't always change our situation, but our attitude about it is up to us. If Paul can be joyful while sitting in a prison being chained to a couple of guards, I guess I can be joyful in my situation too. What if I'm in pain at the moment? Yes I'm pro-medicine. My point is even in the worst situations we can always find something to be grateful for. We may not be able to cheer up Mr. Grumpy but we can always be joyful no matter what we're dealing with.
  - i) Here's an example from my bible study group. A woman works with others who'll complain about her and there's nothing my friend can do to ease that situation. All I can say is I can't fix your problems, but I do know a God who helps us through it who loves us and cares for us. Because we know that He has the power to help us, we can be joyful no matter what the situation. I'm well aware I'm not the one who is going through it and I can't judge unless "I'm in her shoes". All I'm saying is I'm confident that God can help us through whatever situation we're facing if we give it to Him. Then the joy will come no matter what we're facing.
  - ii) You may be thinking right now, wow, John's jumped far away from the text, but I will say that little speech about God being with us, happens to fit very well to the next point Paul's about to make. Speaking of which:
- 8. Verse 10: I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.
  - a) Let's start with the good news. The power of Jesus' resurrection is far more than the fact He was raised from the dead. It gets back to the idea that Jesus is and always will be fully God as well as fully man. The "power" of His resurrection is that He has all the power as well as the will to help us in any situation. It doesn't mean God's going to rescue us based on how we want to be rescued. Remember we're here to do His will, not vice-versa. That means He often allows us to go through trials in order to teach us something that may be of help down the road. For example, I have a very close friend who went through a long and difficult time in his life. Now that it's over, he is able to help others including myself going through a similar thing. My point is simply that we never know how God is going to use whatever situation we're in, but He will use it for His glory if we let Him.

- b) Now let's face the bad news. Paul says he wants to participate his Jesus' suffering. What I suspect is when Paul got to a new town, he must have thought, "Let me know what prison looks like here, because I'm going to end up there sooner or later". So let me ask the tough question, why do we have to suffer as Christians? I'm not talking about the things most of us endure at some point in our lives, but specific suffering for the Gospel. I learned a long time ago that one way to tell when we're really making a difference for Jesus is "stuff" will happen. Yes, I'm talking "bad stuff". I'm just saying it isn't a coincidence if we're doing a good thing for Jesus and all of sudden problems occur. I've learned to accept that stuff as a "badge of honor" that I am making a difference. (I'm not thinking that I am earning any points with God, I just that I know my effort is effective, because the resistance is there!)
- i) What if we're doing a good thing and nothing's gone wrong. No that doesn't mean we're doing something wrong. The power that's in us is greater than the power of this world and sometimes God "binds that power" so we can make a difference. In other situations, God may allow "stuff" to occur simply to remind us that He's still guiding us, He's still there, and by His power we can overcome whatever "stuff" is trying to prevent His will from being done.
- c) OK if that wasn't tough enough, the next thing Paul says he desires to be like Jesus in His death. As I say a lot I don't fear death, but I'm not too crazy about pain! So how are we or how should we be like Jesus "in His death"? No, Paul's not asking us to commit suicide to prove our love for Jesus. While the church has had many a martyr for Him, it's harder for us to live our lives as a witness for Him. The "death" is about living for our own desires. It is about putting our needs above others. It's about being joyful by helping others versus a desire to help our selves. Paul was joyful while being chained to guards in a prison cell. If Paul could be joyful in that situation, we can certainly be joyful despite whatever situation we might be going through at the moment. Being like Jesus in death is a matter of turning from our desires to do His desire. We discover His desire by regular study of His word as we then pray for His guidance and then doing what's logical based on the situation that is in front of us at the moment.
- d) All of that "strange stuff" leads me to Verse 11: Let me repeat it here, "somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead." Let's start with the realization that we don't know how we are resurrected. We don't know scientifically how that works. We simply accept Jesus was resurrected based on post-resurrection evidence of His existence. Paul got that and he too desired to live forever. So is Paul arguing that we got to work hard to be resurrected? As a simple example to prove that's not true, think of the "thief on the cross". Jesus said to him that he would be with Him in heaven. Working hard to achieve salvation is not what Paul is saying. What he wanted to do is use his life as a witness for Jesus. Paul worked his tail off because he didn't want to waste the time God gave him, but use it for His glory.
- i) So are you saying that all of us have to quit our lives, and go work as missionaries somewhere? Let me quote Charles Spurgeon, who many pastors consider to be the greatest bible preacher who ever lived. He was asked by a railroad worker what it is God wants him to do? He responded, "Be a good witness for Jesus to those who are working on the railroad". The point is that God doesn't call everyone to go be a missionary in some foreign country. If we consider ourselves a disciple of Jesus we are missionaries whether we realize it or not. Most of us are missionaries right where we live and others go elsewhere in the world.
- ii) I believe what Paul is getting at here, is the avoidance of being lazy to do what it is God calls us to do. If you believe God's calling you to go preach to a specific place or minister to a certain person, "take the footsteps" and see if God's there to lead us down that path. It's a "You never know until you try" point. We get the impression Paul himself had a lot of trials and errors in His missionary life and so will we. He believed he'd be resurrected because he used his life as a witness for God.

- e) This gets back to the balance between "doing nothing to prove our worth for God" versus doing things to use our lives for God's glory. Of course Paul believed he couldn't earn his way into heaven. At the same time, Paul was never going to "waste good" and sit around not using his life for God's glory. Yes as Christians we're called to work hard to make that difference for Jesus. The key word is "motivation". It's never about proving our worth to God, but strictly working hard out of gratitude for what He's done for us.
  - i) Finally a few words for those who are either too sick, too worn out or trapped in a situation where you feel like you can't be used by God right now. What if it is our desire to be a good witness for Jesus but we're stuck in a tough situation. How do we be a good witness in that situation? We start by praying for His guidance as to what He wants us to learn from that situation. We're always be a witness for Jesus in whatever situation we're in. Most of us are well aware of what we're good at or what we desire to do. Ask God to teach us what it is He wants us to learn from the situation we're in so we can use that knowledge to be a better witness for Jesus in whatever happens in our future.
  - ii) Think of Paul being stuck in prison. Think he wanted to live that way? Paul loved to be out on the road preaching Jesus. However, he was stuck there. We don't read of Paul moaning in misery. We read of Paul being joyful despite that situation and using it to teach others to be joyful despite whatever they and us are dealing with!
- f) Let me return to Verse 11 to wrap up this section. Again it reads, "Somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead." Obviously by now, we know that Paul doesn't believe he has to earn his salvation. Paul simply accepted that resurrection is a reality. Therefore we are to do all we can for Jesus until that reality occurs. That's the point of that phrase. Hey look, there's a Verse 12 and Paul expands upon what he meant by attaining resurrection:
 

9. Verse 12: Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. <sup>13</sup>Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, <sup>14</sup>I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

  - a) Paul doesn't strike me as the type of person who sits around thinking "I accomplished this and that for Jesus. That's enough. I've had enough of whippings and jail cells, it's time for me to call it a life and go retire somewhere". That's not Paul. I'm not saying we can't work toward retirement from a job, but we never retire from being a witness for Jesus until that time when He says, "OK that's a wrap for you".
  - b) So what motivated Paul to keep going? What made him endure all those shipwrecks, time in jail, beatings, stonings and death threats? Paul was still human and I'm sure there were times where he cried out to God, "How much more of this do I have to take?" However he got the idea that his lifestyle wasn't punishment for how he treated Christians prior to his salvation. He lived that way and endured all of that for the "prize" awaiting him.
  - c) The topic of heavenly rewards both exists and is vague. It's not like we get to kick back in heaven on a couch all day watching television in exchange for a lifelong service for Jesus. I see rewards as more opportunity to serve. Remember how we have joy in this life: By us putting others as a priority over our own life. Nothing brings us more joy than to use our lives to make a difference for others. Yes, there are innumerable ways to do that. The point is the greatest way to have joy is by making others a priority over our own interests. What I suspect is that type of joy continues in the next life. The reward we get for service is joy in this life. I'd want that joy to continue forever. That's why I suspect but can't prove that joy through service is part of our eternal life!
    - i) What if you say, "but I want to kick back all day and veg out!" I'm sure that God's going to give us new bodies that don't wear out or require rest. I can't see heaven as a place of boredom, therefore God must give us ways to have joy there as well!



- d) All of that leads us back to Paul's goal to "win the prize". Sporting contents were a part of Paul's world just as it is today. People play sports all over the world to entertain others as well as being rewarded for winning. Paul makes references a few times in his letters to us "winning the race". It's hinted at here in Verse 14. So does that the Christians who do the most good have the most rewards the most in heaven? The issue is not how many people have we saved. The issue is are we using the gifts God's given us for His glory? I'm sure there will be people in heaven greatly rewarded for making a difference in the life of one person, just as there will be people rewarded for making a difference to millions. Again it is not about how many we save, it's about the question of are we giving it our all to make a difference for Jesus in our lives?
  - e) Bottom line, our lives over when God says it is, not a second before that. In the meantime let's use our lives to make a difference for Him in whatever situation we're in!
10. Verse 15: All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. <sup>16</sup>Only let us live up to what we have already attained.
- a) Remember why Paul's writing this letter in the first place. The Christians in Philippi gave Paul some sort of financial gift, while he was stuck in prison waiting to stand trial in front of the Roman Emperor. That trial is literally a life and death experience. Paul's wanted to express his gratitude to that church, by not only saying "Thank You", but also teach how it is that we're to be joyful in life. Paul was full of joy despite being in a horrid situation. He wants all Christians to experience that joy all the time! I consider the main purpose of this letter is to teach us how to be joyful while we're living out the Christian life.
  - b) This attitude is what Paul meant by "maturity". Living the Christian life is not meant to be a sorrowful experience of "poor, poor pitiful me". It's meant to be full of joy as we use our lives as a witness for Jesus by being joyful no matter what we go through in this life.
  - c) Then Paul comments that if the Christians living in Philippi think differently about some point about Christianity, God will clear that up. Many Christians complain that God's not answering their prayers. My response is, "Maybe we're not asking the right questions". He has three possible answers to every prayer is "Yes, no, or not now". I'm convinced a great prayer that God can't resist answering is 1) You're in charge of my life so what is it you do want me to do with my life and 2) I'm confused on this particular doctrinal issue, can I get some clarification here? It always amazes me that when I seek God in order to understand some doctrinal issue better, that issue always gets resolved "sooner rather than later".
    - i) There is nothing God desires more than us drawing close to Him. That's why that act of surrender to Him gets a response from Him. That's why issues were we are confused about some issue over our relationship with God gets answered.
    - ii) Let me throw a tough example here: What about the classical debate over free will versus God's sovereignty? The short answer is we can't solve that debate. We can understand the issue and accept the fact that it's beyond our ability to resolve. It's a good example of drawing closer to God by understanding that issue.
    - iii) The reason I'm bringing all this up here is that Paul is explaining to them when it comes to issues about "maturity" with God (growing in our faith), Paul figured out that drawing close to God with those questions, will always bring us answers as it is God's goal to draw closer to us.
  - d) Then Verse 16 gives an encouragement to "live up to what we've already obtained". Better explain that one. So what do the Philippian Christians and Paul have in common? What have they already obtained and how do they live up to it? The issue of course is salvation. So how do we live up to it? The issue is about trusting in the joy that comes from living as God desires we do. It's about realizing no matter what happens to us, we win. Therefore, we should have a good attitude. Paul expands on this idea in the last handful of verses in this chapter. So let's begin them:

11. Verse 17: Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do.
- a) Paul considers himself a model for how Christians should live. I admit, it's hard for me to think of Paul as someone I want to be like. Here's a man who's resume including suffering in forms I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy. He was regularly beaten, whipped, stoned, and left for dead simply for preaching the Gospel. Around the world today multitudes of Christians suffer and die just for being a Christian. Yes, Paul's attitude is courageous with the circumstances he faced. That's the part I respect. To have a great attitude about life in any situation. We have to admit that alone is worth admiring.
  - b) Then Paul says to "keep an eye on those who live as we do". I don't know about you, but I have a few people who I admire greatly. They aren't the richest or most successful people I know, but they have a joyful attitude as they go through life. They're the kind of people everyone wants to be around because their joy is contagious. They're the type of people I want to be around. That's the type of joy Paul is getting at here.
  - c) What if I don't know anyone like that? As they say in "AA", fake it until you make it. Stop and realize that we owe it to people around us to be joyful. It's contagious and it makes us a great witness for Jesus when we act that way. We can't always control our circumstances but we can always control our attitude. Paul "breathed" that. Obviously, none of us have ever met Paul, but I have met other Christians who I want to live like. That's because they have that type of joy that's, well contagious. It doesn't mean everything that comes out of their mouth is a "Jesus speech". It means that they have a joyful attitude about life and it's a great witness for Jesus, not to mention a great way to go through life.
  - d) I would say that if you get nothing else out of this lesson, it is that Christians are required to be joyful no matter what they go through. Emulating someone who's got that attitude down pat is a good start as this verse recommends, but even if we're surrounded by the worst people imaginable, they can make our situation miserable, but our inner peace is a function of how we think, not our circumstances. That's the point here.
12. Verse 18: For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. <sup>19</sup> Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.
- a) I don't know if Paul's talking about those who claim to be Christians or strictly those who are non-believers. The reason I say that is one can claim to believe Jesus is God and died for every sin they've ever committed and still be an "enemy of the cross". How? By being miserable all the time. Let me think of an extreme example: There was a famous book a few years back about a devout Christian who got into a horrible car accident. He did live through it, but was literally miserable for about a year as he was in tremendous pain as he had to deal with the recovery. This man was a pastor. One of the hardest things a pastor must learn is to let other people minister to them when the chips are down. It wasn't until he started to do that gracefully that his attitude changed about all that pain.
  - b) My point is simply that God wants us to be a good witness for Him at all times. Even if a situation is so tough, all we can do is cry out in pain, it's ok to focus on the pain. Paul was not a "superman" who never complained. I'm sure he cried to God many times in what he had to deal with it. Then he realized, "I can't lose. God's in charge of my life and no matter what happens I win!" That's the type of attitude God wants us to have no matter what we are dealing with. How is being miserable good to anyone around us? No one wants to live with a person who's miserable all the time. Yes, I'm well aware that sometimes we have to live with those types of people. The question is do we let them affect our joy? Do we allow ourselves to be miserable just because someone is being miserable around us? We can't fix them, but we can always control the way we live. My point is we can be an "enemy of the cross" simply by being miserable to other people around us. Being a good witness for God starts with our attitude and then moves on to our actions!

- c) Speaking of misery, let me repeat Verse 19 again, "Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things." Paul could be talking about either believers or non-believers. Our job isn't to judge whether or not a person is saved. All we can do is judge behavior. We do that all the time. His point here has nothing to do with what we eat. It's a metaphor for the fact that people who only care about this life, don't care about pleasing God. Yes there are joyful people in the world who don't believe Jesus is God. That's not the issue. The issue is, are we a good witness for Jesus based on how we act. If all we care about is non-heavenly issues such as what we're going to eat, wear or how we're going to pay the bills, then we're not setting our mind on the "things of God". Everyone has problems. We can go through life complaining about what we don't have or we can realize that God's in charge and we can't lose in life because no matter what happens, we win in the end: If we can't earn our salvation, we can't lose!
  - d) Before I cover the last two verses, realize my goal is not to "pump you up" so we can feel good for the next say, 20 minutes. My goal is to get us to think about our attitude as we go through life. We can choose to be miserable or choose to be joyful. Obviously Paul is one who wants all Christians to be joyful, if for no other reason, than that's the way we're to go through life as believers. Let's face it we're all better witnesses for Jesus if we're in a joyful mood. Therefore, if that's not you, do the "fake it until you make it" routine! Think about how Paul wants us to go through life. Phillipines is part of the bible is it is a great example of how God wants us to live, no matter what the circumstances.
  - e) OK then, put on a joyful face, and let's look at the last two verses.
13. Verse 20: But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.
- a) I've been lecturing all of us on how and why we should be joyful. Paul gets to the source of our joy in these last two verses of the chapter. Remember how I said that if we believe Jesus is God, we can't lose in life? These two verses explain the "why":
    - i) One of the important things for all Christians to grasp is that we're not citizens of whatever country we're living in. Technically we are citizens of that country, but as far as God's concerned our home is in heaven. That means in effect we should have a "light touch" on this world. That doesn't mean we ignore the things all of us have to do to survive. It means we look at our life as "one big time test" to use it as a witness for Jesus. Do we go through situations where we're being miserable to a person because they haven't treated us very well? If we're miserable back to them, we are continuing to let that person hurt us let alone be a bad witness for Jesus.
    - ii) The point here is we're to remember why we're living in the first place. We're all waiting for the day Jesus "brings everything under His control". He's the one who will give us new bodies that don't require rest or wear out. Those new bodies will be like the one Jesus has. I'm not positive what that entails, but given the fact that Jesus can be "everywhere at once" in heaven, it seems like a great deal.
  - b) OK John, how do we know this is not just some big "pipe dream"? How do we know Paul isn't just saying all of this to give us a false sense of hope about another world while we're dealing with our problems of the moment? How do we know all of this "eternity" is true? My favorite way to prove the truth of the bible is 30% of the bible is future predictions of which most of them have already come true if one studies history. Much of the bible is in effect, "God teaching us history in advance to prove that this book came from outside time as we know it". The reason Paul's writing was accepted as "bible worthy" is there's enough evidence to show that Paul got direct messages from God based on the results his writings produced to prove Paul was ordained by God to deliver these messages. The book of Acts explains who Paul was and why God used him the way He did. His writings do tell us of God's eternal plans for us and we can take his writings as being "bible worthy".

- c) The reason I give that speech here is I want you to understand that when Paul tells us that Jesus will return to earth one day, that we will get new bodies that don't wear out and we will be with Jesus forever, not only is all of that true, but we can trust in those promises by what is written in the bible for us to study. One of the great discoveries Christians make is that the bible is not 66 separate books, but an integrated message system written by about 40 authors over thousands of years (from Job's time to end of John's life) in order to teach us about God's love for us and His eternal plans for us.
  - d) Shorter version is all of this is true. The big question therefore is what are we doing about it in our lives? What's our "now what"? If we believe Jesus died for every sin we ever did commit or ever will commit, what do we do until He shows up on the scene? That's what this letter (and the bible in general) is all about. It's about using our lives as a witness for Him until all of that happens. Until God says, "That's a wrap for our lives" He wants us to be a good witness for Him. That begins with a good attitude. It's about having joy in life no matter what we're dealing with. We should be joyful in life, if for no other reason then we owe it to God to live as He desires we live. If God's going to do all these great things for us for eternity, the least we could do is be joyful as we go through this life as we live as a witness for Him to a lost and dying world. That's why we were created in the first place and that's our purpose for living life! Now there's a joyful way to end this lesson so let us stop here and close in prayer and consider how God wants us to behave until "eternity" is happening.
14. Heavenly Father, First, we thank You that You've chosen us to be with You forever. None of us know why we're picked, we just accept it. We were created for the purpose of worshipping You and bringing You glory from our lives. Help us to remember that living as we desire beings with a good attitude. Help us by Your power to experience the type of joy that You want us to have as we realize that we'll live forever in Your presence. Help us to turn from ways that aren't pleasing to You. May we realize that it's Your desire that we be joyful as we use our lives for Your glory. With that said, help us to be a good witness to others around us as we use our lives to make that difference for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.