

“Sola Fide” // Philippians 3:7-11 //
SOLAS

If you have your Bibles begin turning to Philippians 3. If you're using one of the Bibles in the pew rack you'll find our text on page 981.

Wildhaus

On January 1, 1483, only a few weeks after the birth of Martin Luther, high in the Swiss Alps a baby boy named Ulrich was born in the village of Wildhaus.

His father was a shepherd and the chief magistrate for the district, and as Ulrich grew and helped out around the house he began to learn how to take care of his father's flock. From a young age Ulrich was taught the typical Swiss values of independence, patriotism, a love for the church, and as his parents realized his intellectual aptitude they pushed him to pursue higher education.

Chaplain to Mercenaries

Thanks to the family's prosperity Zwingli's father sent him to school in Basel, where he began to learn Latin, philosophy and music. From there he continued his education at Berne and Vienna.

Having graduated with his master's degree in 1506, Zwingli was ordained to the priesthood of the Roman Catholic Church and purchased his first pastorate at Glarus. It was common practice to pay money to a local prince for a church position prior to the Reformation.

While serving as the priest in Glarus, Zwingli also served as a chaplain to the Swiss mercenaries who were hired to fight wars all over Europe. Because these soldiers were for hire Zwingli often watch his own countrymen, hired by separate nations,

killing one another on the battlefield. He soon began preaching against the practice of the mercenary life as a source of income.

Desiderius Erasmus

In 1516, a full year before Luther would nail his 95 theses to the door of the church in Wittenberg, a humanist scholar named Erasmus published his Greek New Testament and Zwingli devoured it. And as Zwingli studied the New Testament in its original language, he was converted. He understood the true gospel, that sinners are not justified before God by their own righteousness. Instead, they are counted as righteous as they place their faith in the righteous life and sacrificial death of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Our salvation is not a product of our merit, or good works. We cannot contribute to our salvation. Christ has earned our salvation and he graciously gives it to all who accept him by faith.

Friend, the gospel which Ulrich learned 500 years ago by reading his Bible... that is the same gospel that we have found for our salvation as well. Many of the people in this room have trusted in the same message— that nothing we can do will make God OK with us. That's because God knows all things. He knows who we all are. He knows who I truly am. He knows what we've done and thought. And because he knows all things and is a just God he will condemn us for our sins.

And therefore, we must have a savior. We must have someone who is righteous enough that God will accept them, but who also loves us enough that they would trade places with us, and bear our sin. Friends, that person is Jesus Christ. He alone lived the faithful life of sinlessness that God requires. He alone loves you enough that on the cross he traded places with you. So we pray, even now, that you would hear his voice and by faith, trust in his sacrifice for your sin.

Not only did Zwingli begin to preach the true gospel, in opposition to the works-based salvation of the Roman Church, he

also came to believe what the Scriptures teach of themselves, namely that the Bible is to be our highest authority on earth, even above the church. Zwingli began to preach against inconsistencies he saw between what the Scriptures said and what the church practiced.

- He began eating Swiss sausages during Lent.
- He petitioned the church to change its doctrine on marriage in the Priesthood, eventually marrying Anna Reinhart

Beginning in 1518, however Ulrich made the shift from being a reformer within the church to a Protestant who left the church. In December of that year he became the “Peoples Priest” of the Great Minster Church in Zurich. One month later, he shocked the people when he removed the Latin lectionary from the Pulpit and began to preach the Gospel of Matthew to his people verse by verse in their own language.

After Matthew he preached through Acts, then Timothy, then Galatians, and so on until six years later he had worked his way through the entire New Testament and then turned to the Old. **The more he preached the Scriptures the further and further he separated himself from Rome, eventually leaving the church in 1522.**

And one of the most crucial points of departure for Zwingli was the doctrine that we are studying today: Sola Fide, or Faith Alone! These words declared that our standing before God cannot come from our own good works. We must look outside of ourselves to someone else, specifically to the person and work of Jesus Christ, if we are to have any hope of standing before God.

So if you’ve found Philippians 3, begin reading with me in verse 7:

7 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

These verses tell us three things:

1. RIGHTEOUSNESS IS OUR BIGGEST NEED
2. RIGHTEOUSNESS IS OUR BIGGEST PROBLEM
3. RIGHTEOUSNESS IS THE GREATEST GIFT YOU COULD RECIEVE

1. WHY WE NEED RIGHTEOUSNESS:

Now, the word righteousness is not a word we use very often in conversation these days, and even when it does get used it’s taken some abused.

I can think of two common uses of the word you’re most likely to hear:

- My children watch the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and say, “That’s totally righteous dude.
- You may be in the break room at the office and hear someone say, “I wish Gary would stop being so self-righteous.

So you are most likely to hear the word righteous in either a superficial way or in a negative way. But what does the word actually mean?

Here it is: **righteousness is a validating performance record of your accomplishments which opens doors.***

So if you want to get a job, you get out your resume. That resume should include all of your accomplishments and experiences.

The door to the job is shut and the resume says, “I want access. Here are all of the accomplishments which I believe have earned me the ability to talk to you. Look at what I’ve done and accept me.”

Or, let’s say you want to get into grad school. You don’t give them your resume. You give them your transcripts. The door to the grad school is shut and you say, “Look at this. Because of these grades, I am worthy. Accept me. Please accept me.

And I hate to tell you this, but we do it with our friends as well. We live in a world where people size you up. So, you dress in a certain way. You talk a certain way. The way you carry yourself in a room says to the people, “Take notice of me. I want to be your friend, so look at what I’m doing to open that door.”

We do this with romance. Looks, figure, how good is the conversation, what are the income generating possibilities for the future? How are you going to get in and have that relationship? You wave a resume. Ladies, there’s a reason that on the first day you probably didn’t wear sweat pants. Guys, there’s a reason why you brushed your teeth. That’s your resume.

And listen to me, you even use a resume to let yourself in. Everywhere in this world people want to see a list of your abilities and accomplishments and your performance before they will open the door for you, and you do the same thing to yourself.

Now, I’ve been using the word resume—but it’s really righteousness. Most people think of righteousness in purely moral or religious terms. But your righteousness is whatever you are looking to make you acceptable, to a job offer, a college, a potential partner, to friends and to yourself.

All of us have these performance records, these degrees, these resumes, and everyone, all over the world believes it’s the same with God!

And therefore, if you are going to have access and connection with God you have to have a moral record. You get out your performance record, and if you’re worthy you’ll be accepted.

We sense this need to prove ourselves, to show our accomplishments, and to gain access to jobs, and people, and even God himself.

And for the first part of his life, Paul believed the same thing! Just a few verses before our passage he says:

If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. (Philippians 3:4-6)

Do you know what that is? It’s his resume. It’s his righteousness. If anyone thinks they have access to God, I have more.

We all sense that we owe something to others, to ourselves and especially to God. And that’s why some many people try to either obey furiously or run and hide from God.

I’ve told you before of the runner, Harold Abrams, from Chariots of Fire—he’s preparing for the race to start and he says,

“And now in one hour’s time, I will be out there again. I will raise my eyes and look down that corridor; 4 feet wide, with 10 lonely seconds to justify my existence. But will I?”

How can I get acceptance from others, from myself? This is my resume. This is my righteousness.

One of the most famous American poets was Edgar Allen Poe. Even though he was an amazing talent, and knew it—he struggled continually with substance abused. And here’s what Poe said,

I have absolutely no pleasure in the stimulants in which I sometimes so madly indulge. It has not been in the pursuit of pleasure that I have periled life and reputation and reason. It has been the desperate attempt to escape from torturing memories, from a sense of insupportable loneliness and a dread of some strange impending doom.

Knowing how I have lived, I cannot accept myself, and I cannot face what I know is coming. I need a validating record, and I don't have one.

You see, we all know that we need righteousness. Notice, that Paul also tells us that righteousness isn't just our biggest need, it's also our biggest problem.

II. RIGHTEOUSNESS IS OUR BIGGEST PROBLEM

Now I'm going to get right to the point here. Why is righteousness our biggest problem? The answer is that we don't have any righteousness that makes us worthy of God's acceptance. Paul proves that to us. Look back at his resume in verse 4. This is his list of righteousness:

If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss

Here you have the Apostle Paul spending a lifetime accumulating spiritual assets and investments and filling up his ledger banking on that column of investments to earn him salvation. That's what he means in verse 9 by the righteousness of my own—derived from the law.

But then he meets Christ, and now he is counting all of his resume, all of his righteousness as a loss, and not just a loss. In verse 8 he calls it rubbish. It's a word that means excrement.

This is a strong statement if you consider what is in his profit column. Here's a list of what was once in his profit column, which he now considers a loss. Paul says all of these, if you look to them as your righteousness, as your validating record, as your salvation, they're waste—they're a loss:

1. You don't become righteous through ritual. The first thing in his profit column said "circumcised on the eighth day." In the literal Greek, "With respect to circumcision, an eighth dayer." He's saying, I went through THE basic ritual of Judaism. I was born into a life of ritual. I was born into my religion. I was born into the Jewish faith.

Listen to me, rituals cannot give you righteousness. I don't care if it's Jewish circumcision, a lighting candles, praying through beads or formula prayers, or even Protestant baptism and the Lord's Supper. Paul says that your righteousness doesn't come through rituals.

2. You don't become righteous through race either. Paul said he was of the people of Israel. But Paul now understands that while Israel was chosen by God to bring his redemption into the world, there is nothing about your nationality, or skin tone, or race that earns righteousness for you.

3. Righteousness doesn't come through your rank. Not only was Paul a Jew, he was from the tribe of Benjamin. What makes this significant is that this was a ranking tribe in Israel. He's saying, "I come from a ranking tribe. I come from a privileged class, and this means nothing to me."

Listen to me, there is nothing about being born into a Christian family, or growing up in a good church that makes you a Christian. We teach the Scriptures to our children.

We want our family to live like a Christian family is called to live, but we make it clear to our children—explicitly clear—that this in no way makes God love them or accept them more.

I never want my children to be deceived into Hell because they thought being a Pastor's Kid or being in a Christian home made them anything special to God.

4. Righteousness doesn't come by Religion. Paul says, "I'm a Hebrew of Hebrews." In other words, even though I was born into Judaism, and I didn't have a choice in that matter, now that I am older I have owned my religious heritage and tradition for myself. I have kept my tradition. And Paul was widely known as a young man because of his devotion to the tradition.

He says, "As to the Law, a Pharisee." This was the highest level of achievement in Judaism. The Pharisee's were the religious radical fundamentalists of the day. Narrow minded, legalistic, literalist fundamentalists. It's estimated that there were no more than about 6,000 Pharisees during the time of Christ.

Do you know people who are up to their ears in religion? Every culture has them. They were the proper clothes, and do all of the proper religious activities.

Paul says religion can't save you. Count it as a loss.

5. Righteousness doesn't come through sincerity. Paul says, "As to zeal, a persecutor of the church." I was such a zealous Jew that I killed Christians. That's pretty zealous.

This world, and perhaps this room is filled with religiously sincere people. And they are hoping that their sincerity will prove acceptable to God. So sincere that they make great efforts, personal sacrifices, and take risks to please God. And Paul says God is not impressed.

Lastly, righteousness doesn't come by the law. Salvation is not

by law-righteousness. Paul says, "As to the righteousness that was found in the law, I was found blameless." Those who watched me couldn't find any breach of the law to hold against me.

7 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.

Don't miss this. Paul does not say, "I filled my life with good things, then I found something better in Jesus."

He says, "I used to think this was an asset. I now know it's a liability." It's as if Paul's life were a ledger sheet. He's saying that everything he used to list in the assets column, he has now shifted over to the liabilities column.

I'm going to say something that at first you won't understand and you might even want to push back on. What Paul is saying here is that our biggest problem isn't sin. Sin is not the main thing that keeps us from God. It's not the main thing that spiritually blinds us. It's not the main reason that people are not Christians.

What Paul is saying is that what made him become a Christian was not that he realized sin was bad. He had known that. What made him become a Christian was that he realized all of his hope for pleasing God was invested in his own righteousness. He had to reorient the way he thought about his good deeds.

Calvin - "We will never have enough confidence in him unless we become deeply distrustful of ourselves."

Righteousness is our biggest need, it's also our biggest problem. Look now, and see that righteousness is the greatest gift you could receive.

III. RIGHTEOUSNESS IS THE GREATEST GIFT YOU COULD RECEIVE

For his sake 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

Paul tells us that our righteousness, our resume that we hand into God comes only through faith. Sola Fide. Faith Alone. And here's what he means. Faith, in and of itself is not pleasing to God. God doesn't reward our faith.

Faith isn't a good work that God accepts as our righteousness. Paul has just made the case that there are no good works that we could do to earn righteousness.

Here's what faith is: it's the instrument that connects you to the faithful, and good, and glorious life and death of Jesus.

Faith is saying that everything I used to list in the assets column, I have now shifted over to the liabilities column. And there in the assets column, I have written one word: **Christ**.

The righteousness you have isn't your own. It's God's righteousness, specifically, it's the righteous record of Jesus that is applied to your ledger as you by faith, take hold of Jesus.

You see, Christianity isn't a salve that you add. It's not an add on. It's changing everything about how you think about yourself and your approval.

What makes someone a Christian is not moving from being an irreligious person to a religious person. You used to do sinful things but now you've stopped.

Paul is saying is that what makes you a Christian isn't just repenting of your sins— it's realizing that the greatest sin you have is trusting in your own righteousness and repenting of that too. That's what faith is.

You say, "I realize that my only resume would be that which God gives me, that God owes me nothing. So, Father, I am trusting what Christ has done, and I want to be found in him, not having a righteousness that comes from myself—but that which comes from him by faith."

Letter to Diognetus

An ancient Christian put it this way:

When our unrighteousness was fulfilled, and it had been made perfectly clear that its wages — punishment and death — were to be expected, then the season arrived during which God had decided to reveal at last his goodness and power (oh, the surpassing kindness and love of God!)

He did not hate us, or reject us, or bear a grudge against us; instead he was patient and forbearing; in his mercy he took upon himself our sins; he himself gave up his own Son as a ransom for us, the holy one for the lawless, the guiltless for the guilty, "the just for the unjust," the incorruptible for the corruptible, the immortal for the mortal.

For what else but **his** righteousness could have covered our sins? In who was it possible for us, the lawless and ungodly, to be justified, **except** in the Son of God alone? O the sweet exchange, O the incomprehensible work of God, O the unexpected blessings, that the sinfulness of many should be hidden in one righteous man, while the righteousness of one should justify many sinners.

The beauty of the Christian gospel is that God finds me in Christ. Is Jesus your hero? Is he your model? He can be those things without being your savior and substitute.

“Lay your deadly doing down. Down at Jesus feet. Stand in him and him alone, gloriously complete.”

In one of the strange ironies of history, Ulrich Zwingli, the young priest who had once decried the mercenary practice as a chaplain, died on the battlefield. In his 12th year of pastoring the church in Zurich, Roman Catholic armies attacked the city trying to end the Reformation there. Zwingli was serving, yet again, as a not as a soldier, but as a chaplain to soldiers. He went to care for the wounded and dying, but he himself was wounded.

Even after he was wounded, as he was kneeling over another soldier telling him about Christ, Zwingli was found by a soldier from the other army. When the soldier saw that Zwingli was dying he asked him if he wanted a priest. And when Zwingli declined a priest for his last rites the soldier knew he was a protestant and killed him. He was only 47 years old.

Why did Zwingli decline the priest? It's because he trusted the Word of God that says we have only one true priest to whom we can confess and find forgiveness of our sins— and we gain access to the forgiveness not by going to a confession booth, but by taking hold of Jesus by faith alone.

Zwingli could die freed from his sins because Jesus Christ had already died for the penalty for his sins and Zwingli had placed his faith in Jesus.

Let's pray.