

Jesus said, *'I have come so they may have life, and have it to the full.'*

Jesus also said, *'I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.'*

Let's face it, most people want to know these things – a life that's full to overflowing, and completeness of joy. Well, that's why Jesus said he came – to give fullness of life, and completeness of joy. So here's a message for every single one of us on this planet. No exceptions, no get out, no hiding your head in the sand. We **all** need to hear the gospel of Jesus – man, woman, child; old, young; successful, struggling; yesterday, today, tomorrow – Jesus is a message that we all need to hear.

-I don't know whether you've seen that programme on telly called 'DIY SOS'. A team of builders goes into the houses of people, because, for one reason or another, they can't manage on their **own**. They send out an **SOS**, because they've come to the end of their abilities, or means, or even health and recognise that they need proper help. These builders come in, and show compassion in giving people what they **need**, even going **beyond** what they say they want.

I want us to see this evening that we need to send out an SOS to God – a cry for help. Some people think SOS stands for 'save our souls' – well, who better to come to than the One who is God?

Let's return to the letter to the Philippians, and read tonight from chapter 3:1-11.

-As we discovered this morning, the apostle Paul was writing this letter while under house arrest in Rome, yet we find him joyful and encouraging the believers in Philippi to be joyful too, and so we read in the first verse of **this** chapter that he is urging them to rejoice.

He can do this because he knows the One who said the things we started off with this evening, he knows the One who said, *'that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.'* Even under the constraints of house arrest, he knows the joy that is complete.

Paul's found what we're **all** looking for – how to be joyful even in situations we'd rather not **be** in. If you want to know real joy, if you want to know life that is **full**, listen on, listen to Paul, listen to **God**. (Nobody's leaving, so I guess we all **do!**)

-Paul travelled hundreds of miles, just telling everybody **everywhere** the message he'd been given by God. He realised how **vital** it was that everyone heard this truth. In the next few moments I want us to think about the importance of getting the **true** message, the **contents** of the true message, and then the **rewards** of the true message.

Firstly then, **the importance of getting the true message**. Paul tells the believers in Philippi to **rejoice** in verse 1, but then before he explains **why** they can rejoice, he quickly gives a **warning** in verses 2 to 4. *'Watch out for those **dogs**, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh.'* He starts.

We see Paul getting cross here, because some Jews were adding to the gospel that **he** had shared with them 10-12 years earlier. He calls them **dogs**, a strong insult. The **reason** was that they were saying that the gospel **Paul** had taught wasn't **enough** to save people – they said they needed the old laws and traditions and customs **as well** to make them right with God. And this made Paul's blood boil. You'll remember that Jesus appeared to him and spoke to him on the road to Damascus, he **knew** Jesus was all we need – the message he brought about Jesus was and **is** all that people need to be put right with God.

Paul says, don't listen to those dogs, those who add to the gospel, those who say you have to perform certain rites to be a Christian, you have to abide by certain traditions to be saved, you have to go through certain ceremonies to be made right with God. Don't listen to them, Paul says, you only need Jesus Christ, nothing and no-one else. The Beatles sang 'All you need is love', but the love that everybody needs is **Jesus'** love, because **his** love took him to the cross to die for your sins, this love is all you need to know. Nothing more, nothing less, nothing else.

We have to be sure that we're hearing and getting the true message from God, not something that's been added to, or the opposite watered down. We have to make sure as **believers** that we share the gospel as it **is**; or as **non-believers** we have to make sure that we hear the **true** message from God. And this is why Paul got angry, because to rob people of the **true** message, robs them of eternal life in all its fullness, it **robs** them of the life Jesus came to give them.

Sad to say, in the world we live in, in **some** churches in our country, the true message of God is **not** preached. In some churches today, a message will have been preached just to please the congregation. The truth will have been watered down so that no-one in the congregation would be upset. They'll have changed the timeless gospel of God in order to, so they say, keep up with the times, to keep in touch with reality, to make it more acceptable to the way society is **today**.

How dangerous and utterly foolish. Men, women and children don't need to hear a message that is just **nice** so that it doesn't upset their way of life and they continue doing the things they always do and go their own way and not **God's**. They need to hear the **true** message of God or there is no point them hearing the message at **all**. 'Watch out for those dogs,' Paul says, 'they aren't sticking to the true message, they're **misleading** you, they're not leading you to God, they're leading you to destruction. You don't **need** to add to what Jesus has done for you. You must listen to the true message of salvation.'

How important it is to get the true message. God has given us the timeless, unchanging, faultless message of salvation in the Bible, and we must make sure that we get the true message from **here**, and not change it to appease our consciences or make us feel good. We **can't** disregard what God tells us here because that would just **rob** us of the effects the true message can have on our lives. How can we afford to **do** that? We **can't**.

-So **what is this message** that is so important to hear properly? Jesus said, '*I am the bread of life. He who comes to **me** will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.*' John 6:35. He'd just provided food for more than 5000 from a few loaves and fish, but **here** he talks about eternal life for those who believe in him. Coming to Jesus and believing in him are what we need, what we **all** need, to receive that full life and complete joy that we talked about earlier.

You see we've all gone our **own** way, we've done exactly what we wanted. **DIY** is what we do now. We've taken things into our own hands. In days gone by there were lots of people qualified to do jobs around the house for us and we relied upon the professionals to do the job **properly**. Now, whether it's because of cost or because of pride, we don't want to seem useless by getting someone else to do the job, we do it ourselves.

We do the same with God. Whether it's the cost of going God's way, or whether it's our pride, not willing to say that we're not in control of the way our lives should be led, we **DIY**, we do it **ourselves**, we go our **own** way, we make all the decisions, we **disregard** God if he doesn't fit in with our way of wanting to do things.

This is what Paul is talking about when he says putting confidence in the flesh, in verses 3 and 4. The Bible calls this **sin**. This is ignoring God. This is rejecting God. And this separates us from God. The Bible tells us that '*the wages of sin is **death**,*' [Romans 6:23], living life without God leads to **eternity** without God. I don't know about everyone here this evening, but I certainly don't want that to happen to **me**.

I would much rather experience what it says at the **end** of that quote, *'the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.'* Life in all its **fullness** is a gift of God. We can't put our confidence in the flesh to put us right with God, that'll never work.

Because Peter (our son) works in an accounts firm, I've heard a bit about double entry accounting; basically the accounts are filled out in 2 columns in such a way that everything is **fine** as long as one column balances the other. On jury service recently, I was on a trial where the person made the two columns balance by giving **themselves** a payment every now and then, but it was difficult to notice because the columns balanced.

-We like to think that our life before God works like that – as long as it **balances** when we leave this life, we'll be OK with God. Scratched the neighbours' car while parking – minus; forgot to pay the electric bill on time – minus; made a mess in the kitchen with muddy boots – minus; rode my bike through a red light – minus. But I **did** help that old lady across the road – plus; I **did** hold the door open for that man on crutches – plus; I did eat all my greens although I hate cabbage – plus. I'm OK, they balance each other out, and if I just put my dirty washing in the bin tomorrow I'll be in **credit!**

No analogy is satisfactory when talking about the things of God. But imagine that God writes down our accounts like this. In **one** column are the requirements for us to be saved, for us to have a relationship with him, for us to know life in all its fullness – that's one column. This column has the words 'punishment for sin'. This is what we owe. The Bible says we need to **pay** for our neglect of God, for ignoring him and going our own way. The first column headed 'punishment for sin'.

The other column's headed 'payments towards salvation'. In this column **we** put all the things **we** see as important – helping the old lady, helping the man on crutches, eating healthily, doing our chores, going to church, reading our Bible each day, going on this or that church rota.

The bad news is that considering all these things, we still owe the full payment towards salvation. These **don't count** towards salvation. We can't put **any** confidence in the flesh – that is in anything we achieve ourselves. We still owe the full amount of our salvation. In verses 5 and 6, Paul gives a whole list of all the things that **he** once thought should have earned **him** salvation – he came from a religious Jewish family, he was doing all the things the Jewish religion required of him. If anyone was assured of salvation, surely **he** was.

But then he met **Jesus** on the road to Damascus, and his whole life changed. He realised all these things that were in the plus column in **his** accounts with God, were actually **useless**, rubbish. Profit turned to loss; ‘*.. whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.*’ Verse 7 says.

Paul was putting his confidence in what he was and achieved before he met Jesus; Nicodemus – as we’ve been hearing recently – was putting his confidence in the flesh, in his religious practices, until he met Jesus who said, ‘*No-one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.*’ John 3:3. We can’t put our trust in what we are or what we can do, there’s no DIY merit before God. I can have no confidence in what I **am** to put me right with God.

And you know, this makes me very relieved. The Bible’s got it dead right, because if I’m **honest**, I know that I’ll never ever be good enough to make it. If it depended on **me**, I would never make it. I can never please God fully. Even if I ever **do** get to that place where I say, yes, I think I’m OK, how will I ever **sustain** that position?

So the **great** news is that I don’t need to put **myself** right with God.

Think back to God’s book of accounts: one column we said was headed ‘punishment for sin’, the other column headed ‘payments towards salvation’, and we said that no matter what we **do**, those things carry **no worth** towards our salvation – they may be evidence of our being right with God, but they don’t do anything to **achieve** salvation. So how are the accounts made to **balance**? The punishment for our sin is such a great price, and we can’t do anything to pay it.

-Well, we’re told in the Bible that by adding **Jesus** to the ‘payment towards salvation’ column, the accounts balance **perfectly**. The punishment for sin is cancelled to **nothing**. All that was required for us to be made right with God is provided by Jesus, who loved us, and went to that cross, and he died there, to pay the punishment that we – each one of us – deserve to pay, so that we, so that I, so that you can receive the life that Jesus came to give – life in all its fullness.

The message is so **simple** – don’t put your trust in yourself and your own ability to put yourself right with God, don’t Do-It-Yourself, you **can’t**; lean fully on **Jesus** and what he’s done as he died on the cross, as he rose victoriously from death, as he now rules in heaven. Only belief in Jesus can bring you into a right relationship with God. Jesus said, ‘*I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.*’ [John 14:6]

This is the message of the gospel, we need to add **nothing** to this, we don't need to change this message – we **can't** because this is **God's** message, and who are we to change God's requirements? Believe in Jesus; he **alone** will make you right with God.

Paul says in verse 9, *'not having a righteousness that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.'* **This** is how to live a life that is full, and to know joy that is complete. Having righteousness means being in a right relationship with God. The great thing is that it comes from **God**, **not** us, not me. It's a **gift**. The only righteousness, the only thing that puts me right with God, is what he has given in Jesus. Everything else is **inadequate**, not fit for purpose.

What puts me right with God, comes from God and comes through faith in Jesus. God made it happen, so it's going to satisfy. Jesus is the sum total of everything that pleases God. On the cross, the only man who has ever lived a sinful life identified with us in our sin. The Bible says, *'God made him who had **no** sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.'* [2 Corinthians 5:21]. In a wonderful and miraculous way, we're made right with God, because he paid for our sin on the cross. What a great message this is – how foolish to ignore it, how dangerous to change it.

-Let's turn finally to **the rewards of this message** for a little while.

Well, Paul says in verse 8, *'I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him.'*

-You can hear the excitement and joy in his voice (or his pen) as he writes these words, can't you? For him there is **nothing** greater than knowing Jesus, nothing surpasses being in a right relationship with God through Jesus. This is a greatness which surpasses everything. This is life in all its fullness. There is nothing greater than knowing Jesus. This is the greatest treasure you can find.

Jesus tells the parable, doesn't he, in Matthew's gospel, of the man who found treasure in a field, and in his great **joy**, it says, he went and sold all he had and bought that field. *'I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him.'* This is the greatest reward of this message – to be 'in Christ'.

What does this mean, to be in Christ? Well, if we look into Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to the Corinthians, we read in chapter 5:17, *'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!'* When God leads us to recognise that Jesus has done **everything** to put us right with him, and when we ask for forgiveness for ignoring him in our lives, and when we believe that he is Lord of our lives, he makes us **new**.

This is what Jesus was talking about to Nicodemus *'You must be born again.'* Becoming a Christian is like being born again, it's becoming a new creation. All our attitudes **change**. God gives us a new **life**, a new heart, a new nature. And the old things don't have the meaning and attraction they had before.

A new life with God through Jesus is what Jesus was talking about when he said he came to give life in all its fullness. Life as it was meant to be. New life. Eternal life. Life in heaven, with God, who **is** life, who is **love**, who is all **goodness**. *'everything's a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.'* There is no greater thing than knowing the One who loved you and gave himself for you.

-Paul wants to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, verse 10. Being made right with God, is a gift from God. But we have to live the **life** of being right with God. We're given a new heart, a new desire to know Christ in our daily lives. We want, like Paul to know Jesus more and more. And it's wonderful to know that the power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in Christians to **strengthen** us and **enable** us as we get to know Jesus in our everyday lives.

Paul and every believer knows that the way may be tough at times. Jesus suffered, so those who follow him must expect to follow him in suffering too. We don't know the path that we will have to follow. But Paul knew that he would *'attain to the resurrection of the dead.'* (verse 11)

He knows that because Jesus died and rose again, believers **too** can look forward to living a risen life as well. The 'somehow' of verse 12 indicates that he doesn't know when and **how** this will be done, but Paul is convinced that it **will** happen.

Philippians 4:19 says, *'And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.'* The great reward of believing the gospel of Jesus is that by whatever route God chooses, the believer will be **empowered** by the risen Jesus, will be **accompanied** by Jesus himself, and after finishing **this** life will enjoy the glory of **resurrection** forever with Jesus.

This is the **true** message of Christ, life in all its fullness, joy that is complete. **Nothing** surpasses the greatness of knowing Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

Send out an SOS to God – there's no Do-It-Yourself with God, we don't need to, God's done **all we need** to put us right with him. We're not just getting a superficial makeover; God's gift is a whole new life, a whole new home, we're a new creation, we're in Christ. Forever. Full life. Complete joy.