



FROM THE RECTORY

I want to know Christ Sermon - 6th August 2023

Philippians 3:7-11

“But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 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 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. I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.”

This is an extraordinary passage if we take it seriously and properly apply it to our lives today. I wonder what we consider to be our “gains”? Do we feel proud of the things we’ve achieved in our lives? I do!

How highly do we value our educational achievements, or our sporting achievements, or our creativity or musical prowess, the fact we can actually afford to live in Chesham Bois...! Do we feel we’ve “made it” once we’re financially secure? There are all sorts of things that all of us actually consider to be gains, and that also means that these things fundamentally help us to feel secure in one way or another. In our society as a whole, we place a huge amount of emphasis on our personal successes – we put our awards on display – almost like an advert for the things we’ve been able to accomplish!

And yet Paul writes, “**Whatever** were gains to me, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ I consider them **garbage**, that I may gain Christ and be found in him.”

I'm not saying that we shouldn't celebrate with one another over the good stuff – those of us who are parents know how wonderful it is to feel proud of our kids when they've achieved something. Celebration is good – our giftings and talents are God-given after all. **But** – I do think we need to change our perspective.

This is about what we value most. That word which the NIV translates as '**garbage**' is essentially the same word that is used for dung. We know that Paul chooses his words wisely and carefully. What Paul is saying is that those things which we have valued so highly (and some of them may be good things), are **nothing** compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus, of being made righteous by Jesus, of being united with Jesus both now and forever. That's the big picture in this passage.

Maybe we need to take a really honest look at what we value most highly in our lives. It doesn't have to be achievement; dare I say it, it could also be things like the style of worship, or the time of the service – these things wouldn't be causing disunity if that wasn't true.

If we can really get hold of what Paul is saying in such a heartfelt way, I believe our lives will be genuinely transformed.

I want to take us back to the beginning of the chapter that Chris spoke about last week. Verse 1 "*Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord*". If we truly value knowing and being known by Jesus above all else, then no matter what challenges we're facing, what hardships we're having to endure, we will be able to rejoice. The greatness and glory and goodness and love of Jesus are far far far beyond anything that the world can offer or throw at us. In Jesus we have everything, we have such an abundance that nothing in this world can take from us.

There is no doubt that we are walking through difficult days at the moment. We are experiencing extraordinary opposition to the plans for the redevelopment of the PC. There are associated problems with the Parish Council. There are people who are desperately upset about the need to close Maryland. There are so many people who have set themselves up in opposition to us, people looking for someone to blame for their upset, people perpetuating lies about who we are, what we stand for and the plans we have.

There are people in our wider community who genuinely hate us. There are people who think they hate us because they really do believe we want to build on the common, and there are people within St Leonard's who are angry about the changes in the services. It's so easy to get bogged down in this, to get stuck in the mire of negativity, cursing, lies and discouragement. I know -

because there are days when it is really, really tough. It's tough on our emotions and sometimes it feels like the onslaught is too much, especially when some of that onslaught becomes personal.

But – none of this is a surprise to the Lord, and in his incredible grace and mercy and love, He has given us beautiful revelation – firstly about what is going on, and secondly about what He is calling us to do in the face of it. He has given us his strategy for the battle.

What we are facing fundamentally is not a battle over here with the planners and local residents, another battle over there about Maryland, another battle in this corner with the Parish Council, a battle within our own fellowship over the call to worship together, and another separate battle over our reducing finances and whatever else. **No!** What it's absolutely vital to see is that these are all different aspects of the same battle - with the enemy - **to stop God's kingdom advancing here in this place.** It's so important that we understand that. This is a scheme designed ultimately to destroy the church, and the enemy will use whatever means he can to do so.

It's not a new battle – it's been going on for a long, long time. But the battle is intensifying because we are dangerous to the enemy. We are a lion-hearted prophetic people who are courageous and who understand that the Gospel message is a message of life and death. So the enemy has upped the ante because he is losing his hold over this place. We can already clearly see some of his strategy – instilling fear over finances, causing people to leave, discrediting us and our reputation, bringing disunity.

Last week we shared a word that was given about storm clouds gathering on the horizon, we can't avoid them – there is an inevitability to the attack, but in that word, the Lord also promised that He will see us through it. Like others, my immediate reaction was “you mean it's going to get worse, this isn't the storm?” And I believe that – I believe it will get worse as the battle for Chesham Bois intensifies. But actually that word also encourages me because it assures us of victory.

So what has God told us to do as we fight this battle?

1. UNITY IS FUNDAMENTAL

He has called us to unity – and in particular unity in worship. This isn't a new call – the Lord has been speaking to us about this for a long time. This is why we are seeking to encourage everyone in our fellowship to meet together at our main 10.30 service. This is why we have changed service patterns. It's so not about preferences in style or liturgy or music or hymns. This is fundamentally a call to obedience so that we are united in the battle against the enemy,

because the power of God is manifest in our agreement and unity.

Listen again to the sermons on unity from a few weeks ago. I remember saying then that the call to unity in worship is not on the whim of the leaders – it's a call from the Lord and anything less than pursuing unity wholeheartedly is rebellion.

An army moving forward together can advance and take ground. Individuals and small groups can be picked off and taken out. I had a word last week that disunity causes fractures, and the enemy will capitalise on those tiny fractures and split them wide open. If we find ourselves agreeing with the grumbling and complaining, we will contribute to the conflict and dissension and the enemy will take more ground, and we will end up cursing our leaders. That is why the call to unity is so vital. It is a God-given strategy in the battle we're facing.

2. WE ARE RAISED WITH CHRIST

The Lord has told us to pray from above and not below. What I mean by that is that He is asking us to see what's going on from a heavenly realm perspective, and pray from the place of knowing who we are, whose we are, and where we are. We can come under all the rubbish (I would prefer to use a much ruder, stronger word than that!) Or we can pray out of our real identity as God's chosen sons and daughters - knowing that we have been raised with Christ, knowing we have been seated with Him in the heavenly realms, and that we have God-given authority over the enemy, and knowing that the enemy has been defeated.

If we stay low and see things only from a human perspective, it can actually be a very depressing view. Being obedient to this makes all the difference in the world. You and I are here now, not by any accident or chance. God has called us, every single one of us, to be here at this time in this season to play our part in enforcing the victory and breaking the hold that the enemy has had over this place for a very long time.

3. GO ON THE OFFENSIVE - it's not about being nice

The Lord has called us to go on the offensive now. Those of you who were here a couple of weeks ago may remember the picture I shared. I saw the army (that's us) mounted on horseback and riding into battle. Our weapons, like jousting lances, were down and facing forward. We need to go on the attack in the spiritual battle. It's no longer ok just to defend ourselves when the attack comes, the Lord is calling us to be intentional and proactive, not just passive and reactive. We need to remember that our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, powers and authorities of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Eph 6:12).

We also need to remember that the enemy does use people, and so when we find ourselves in those situations where we are face to face with those who oppose us, it's no good just being "nice". We can be loving, we can be kind, but we also need to recognise the enemy strategy and come against it. Niceness doesn't do that. Look again at the beginning of Phil 3 that Chris preached on last week. In v.2 Paul writes "*watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh.*" We need to do the same – if it's in the Bible, it's true!

A very prophetic friend shared some extraordinary revelation with me last week that the Lord gave her in 2008. God showed her a tsunami sweeping through Chesham Bois. It destroyed houses, buildings, everything in its path. However, it didn't touch the church, and God's saints gathered at the door of the church not only survived but they were safe and unharmed. And the devastation brought by the tsunami actually brought desperately needed cleansing to the land, washing away all that was evil.

I want to finish by taking us to Matthew 8. In v.20-22, we see Jesus speaking to people who want to follow Him, but who actually want to put other (good) things first, or for whom the cost is just a little bit too high. Then in v.23-27 we read this:

"Then [Jesus] got into the boat and his disciples followed him. Suddenly a furious storm came upon the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him, saying, 'Lord, save us! We're going to drown!' He replied, 'You of little faith, why are you so afraid?' Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. The men were amazed and asked, 'What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!'"

Jesus, knowing His identity and security were in God his Father, was able to sleep even in the middle of the storm. Remember the Living in Freedom teaching? Everything we need to live like Jesus has already been set within us.

I want to encourage you.

Whatever happens, if we are being obedient to the Lord and are not in rebellion, we will be safe and we will see victory – it's a promise. When fears rise up, that's ok. We need to face them, and give them over to the Lord – just as Jesus encouraged his disciples in the boat. I don't think for one moment Jesus is frustrated with his disciples when they're hit by fear. I believe He's speaking out of deep compassion and love, "oh you of little faith, why are you so afraid?" like a parent to a small child. And when we release our fears to God, we can enter His rest and sleep in the eye of the storm.

Ultimately we have a choice – to believe the revelation, and walk in obedience to the Lord’s call, knowing we are both called to this and equipped for what lies ahead, or to bury our heads in the sand and ignore what we’ve heard until the storm passes. Believe me, only one of those decisions will keep you safe.

So I want to say to every single member of St Leonard’s, rise up church and take your place, and see the victory of the Lord over Chesham Bois.

Wendy