

Joyful Dependence

Philippians 3:1-11

"Do you trust me?"

"Aaron, I know we don't know each other very well, but I am your pastor so would you say that you trust me?"

- He squirms a little but probably says, "Sure," with some nervous expectation of what might come next.
- **"Ok, have you ever done a trust fall?"** And I lead him to the edge of the stage, I jump down below him and say, **"Do you believe that I will not let you get hurt - even if you lean back and fall off this stage?"**
- At this point he's probably a little nervous but hopefully he would agree.
- Then I jump back up on stage and say, **"Now, you know that faith that can see isn't really faith at all - so to teach the church family what real faith is I need to put this blindfold on you."** I help him get a blindfold on and then lead him back to the edge of the stage, with his back to the audience.
- Here is the question we are wrestling with today: **What does real faith look like?**

At this point Edson and Rob come quietly up into a catching position so that Aaron doesn't know they are there but they are ready to catch him even if he doesn't lean back very well.

Aaron hears me walk down the stairs on one side, walk past the catching position and back up the stage on the other stairs, talking all the way – **"The test of faith is not what you Say but what you Do. If you really trust a person it's not enough just to SAY that you trust them, you need to demonstrate the trust in action. Like James writes in the Bible, "Faith without deeds is dead." So..."** [my voice now clearly in front of him / beside him - not behind him] **"Aaron, do you believe that I will not let you get hurt?"**

- At this point he may chicken out - which is totally fine - everyone will get a laugh when he removes the blindfold and sees there was a plan after all. Then we can have him go ahead and fall back so you guys catch him.
- OR he will go ahead and trust me and fall back not knowing how it will work out - exercising true faith.
- Either way I conclude: **"The main thing to understand with faith is that**
- **The value of faith is not in its Quantity but in its Object.**
- **It's not HOW MUCH you believe, it's IN WHAT you believe – or in WHOM you believe.**

Does it matter how sincerely you believe you can fly or levitate? You could work yourself up for days to say, "I believe I can fly! I believe I can fly!" But the result would be determined not by how MUCH you believe it but by WHAT you believe in.

- **And the test of faith is not what you SAY but what you DO. If the ONE you believe in is trustworthy then even a little bit of faith in that person will move you to ACT in response to his direction. Let's say thank you to Aaron for being such a good sport and showing us what faith in action looks like!"**

This little exercise raises the question: ***where is your trust?*** On what or in whom are you depending? ***What does real faith look like?*** Aaron said at first that he trusted me but when he heard my voice in front of him rather than behind him he had to make a decision to trust even when he couldn't be sure how it would work out.

Mark Twain said that ***"Faith is believing what you know ain't true."*** – Mark Twain. But real faith is entirely based on **what you know IS true** – and acting on those convictions even when you don't fully understand what God is up to. You know He is good, He is with you, He will take care of you – but you don't know exactly what His plans are right now.

We could adjust Twain's quote just a little to say ***"Faith is believing in the One who is always True."***

Do you trust in the Lord? Are you acting on that trust day by day, moment by moment? Or are you tempted to put your confidence in something or someone other than Jesus?

We all say we trust the Lord – that our trust is IN the Lord. But do our lives prove out that claim? Are we LIVING like those who really are CONFIDENT in our God? Our **WORDS** say we trust in Jesus, what do our **ACTIONS** show about what we really believe?

Our lesson today is on **Joyful Dependence**. Let's fix our eyes on Jesus and ***fill our hearts with confidence in Him***. He will never let us fall. He is the One we can completely trust. It's not about the amount of faith we have in him, it's about securing Christ as the OBJECT of our faith. That is the path to life and joy and peace – to trust in the Lord with all of your heart and deliberately choose not to lean on your own understanding or your own abilities – to fix your confidence in Christ; to throw yourself upon Him; to rest in His all-sufficient grace, revel in His all-surpassing glory and rely on His Almighty power.

Here is the big idea for today: **Entrusting yourself completely to Jesus is only way to have real joy and safety**. Let's walk through Philippians 3:1-11 together and see the two keys to joyful dependence on Christ.

The first key is to **Reject Self-Reliant Religion**. ***"Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh."*** Philippians 3:1-2

Here again is Paul's central theme in Philippians: Rejoice in the Lord. Fix your joy in Him. Let Jesus be the North star in your heart and life: orient everything toward Him and around Him. This command and the following warning are "safe for you" – Paul's concern is their safety, their protection.

So he warns them to "Look out for the dogs." The image here is not of cute little puppies but of dangerous wild dogs – like wolves – that roamed in packs in Paul's day and would rush suddenly into a village attacking people and devouring children. This is a serious warning. These "evildoers" who "mutilate the flesh" were dangerous false teachers preaching a different way of salvation – by following the Law of Moses.

Paul exhorts the believers at Philippi to reject this self-reliant religion, remaining watchful and **Alert for false teachers who preach the messages of “Believe in yourself!” and “You can do it, God can help.”**

In Paul’s day such teachers were called Judaizers and they would swoop in after Paul left a church and say, “We agree with everything Paul taught you but just want to add this one little thing that will complete your Christianity – obeying the rich traditions in the Torah. You *could* go on without this but you would be missing out on the full experience of what it means to believe in and follow Jesus.”

They wanted the early Christians to believe in Jesus AND the Law of Moses; to believe in Jesus AND believe in themselves. This is VERY common today as well. Most people I have talked with about the gospel give some kind of lip service to believing in Jesus but you can tell they don’t believe in Christ ALONE. They want to add a little supplemental salvation coverage and the best candidate they can think of to believe in as well is themselves. “Jesus and me!” what a team!

Brothers and sisters, watch out for this message in our culture and even in your own heart. We must be alert for false teachers who invite us to water down our faith in Christ with any kind of AND. Our faith must rest in Christ ALONE.

Paul goes on to elaborate what it looks like to reject self-reliant religion in verses 3-8.

“For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— ⁴though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee;

⁶as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. ⁷But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸Indeed, 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...”

This is the internal side of rejecting self-reliant religion. Just as we must be alert for false teachers around us, so we must keep watch for the impulses inside of us. In our hearts are we placing our confidence in ourselves? Paul calls this “confidence in the flesh.” The two options for Paul are life in the Spirit or life in the flesh – and we see that contrast in v. 3.

True believers need not be circumcised in their physical bodies because “we ARE the circumcision,” we ARE marked with the blood as belonging to the Lord. In Romans Paul says that physical circumcision has no value if the heart is far from God.

So where is your confidence? Are you depending on yourself, even a little? Or can you sincerely say that you GLORY in Christ Jesus? That HE is your confidence, HE is your hope, HE is your life, HE is your security, HE is your BOAST?

Remember when the young man **David** brought some food to his older brothers who were supposedly soldiers in the army of Israel? David was probably only 14 or 15 years old – not old enough to actually fight in the war, just old enough to run food to the front lines. But when he got

to the front lines he heard the Philistine champion – a massive warrior nearly 10 feet tall – taunting the whole army of Israel. ***Goliath was making a BOAST*** – building up the confidence of his fellow soldiers and clearly communicating where his confidence was: in the strength of his arms and the weapons in his hands.

Young David heard this boast and his blood boiled within him. When David ran out to face the giant who was fully twice his size, David too shouted a boast.

“You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head... that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel... For the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hand.” 1 Samuel 17:45-47

David's boast was in the power of His God. Goliath's boast was in the power of himself. What is your boast? Where does your confidence lie?

If anyone who ever lived had reasons to “believe in himself” it was the religious Jew named Saul of Tarsus. He was impressive in terms of his race, reputation and religion. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews from the prestigious tribe of Benjamin. He had the highest reputation among religious leaders of the first century, having been trained as a Pharisee, in the top school of his day under the Rabbi Gamaliel. And his religious exercises far surpassed his peers, both in zealous passion for the Lord and in diligent action – even persecuting those who dishonored his God.

But Paul, looking back on his life before Jesus, says “whatever GAIN I had I counted as LOSS.” This is the language of accounting. What I once considered a CREDIT I now realize was a DEBIT. What seemed to be a positive GAIN was actually a negative LOSS.

Rejecting self-reliant religion *externally* means being alert for false teachers exhorting you to “believe in yourself.” *Internally* it means ***Acknowledging that our best Qualities and Efforts are Garbage.***

He goes beyond his previous status and achievements to say in v. 8 ***“Indeed, I count everything as loss,”*** when compared to Christ. EVERYTHING in this world. Not just what Paul had achieved but everything he COULD HAVE achieved. Everything is a DEBIT even though it may look so much like a CREDIT.

“For his sake” Paul says in v. 8 ***“I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish.”*** Here is another strong word: rubbish, trash, refuse, waste, filth, manure. Paul traded his entire previous life – everything he had worked for, his lineage, his parents' approval, his vocational achievements, his status as a Pharisee, his credibility before his peers, his livelihood, his RIGHTEOUSNESS before men – he gave it all up in exchange for Jesus.

And the reason is so revealing: ***it was all trash anyway.*** When we look back on the last year or the last ten years some of us may feel pretty proud of what we've accomplished – or at least our moms are pretty proud of us. But in reality, if all of our achievements were piled up and we stood on top of them we would look down and see that we were standing on a pile of garbage – in fact

we were knee deep in cow manure. Paul writes, “I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish.”

The first key to joyful dependence on Jesus is to reject self-reliant religion. This means to be alert EXTERNALLY for false teachers who tell you to “believe in yourself.” INTERNALLY it means to acknowledge that our best qualities and our best efforts are actually garbage. We must not put any confidence in the flesh. We must not boast in our own achievements lest we revel like pigs in our own filth rather than coming to Jesus to be washed clean.

Beware, dear friends, of the deadly lure of self-reliant religion. Reject it. The second key is to **Rely on Jesus as the only source of life**. Get off of the sinking ship that is your life and get on board with Jesus who is the only lifeboat. Reject the lie that you are good enough or strong enough to swim to safety and take hold of Jesus hand as he offers to lift you up from the stormy waters of your sin.

Jesus IS the only source of life. Choose Him – every day – as your happiness, your hope and your help. Entrusting yourself completely to Jesus is the only way to have real joy and safety. So fix your confidence in Him alone!

Make Jesus your happiness. Delight in Him as your ultimate treasure. In the light of the all surpassing glory of Christ, everything else is dust and dung. Everything else. Only Jesus offers the living water that can satisfy your soul both now and forever. This is the great exchange. Trade the muck and mire of your sin-stained life for ***“the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”***

This is what ***Saint Augustine*** discovered in his early thirties. Like Paul, Augustine had achieved everything he had attempted. He was a successful and well-recognized professor in a prestigious school. He had a faithful girlfriend and a son. He had every reason to expect a long, happy, successful, prosperous life. But he knew something was missing. He felt, deep in his bones, that it was possible to gain the whole world and forfeit your soul. He felt a hunger that all of the world’s success and pleasure could not satisfy. He began to study wisdom and Scripture and he was drawn to God – but he would always fall back into his familiar temptations and sins.

“Your beauty drew me to you, but soon I was dragged away from you by my own weight and in dismay I plunged again into the things of this world.” (Piper 50)

Finally the Lord spoke to Augustine through the book of Romans – indeed, through two short verses: ***‘Not in reveling and drunkenness, not in lust and wantonness, not in quarrels and rivalries. Rather, arm yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ; spend no more thought on nature and nature’s appetites’*** (Rom. 13:13-14).

In an instant he yielded his will to the Lord and he said, ***“It was as though the light of confidence flooded into my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled.”*** (53)

Later Augustine reflected:

“How sweet all at once it was for me to be rid of those fruitless joys which I had once feared to lose...! You drove them from me, you who are the true, the sovereign joy. You drove

them from me and took their place, you who are sweeter than all pleasure... O Lord my God, my Light, my Wealth, my Salvation.” (19)

Augustine could not overcome his temptations and attachments to the world through philosophy of the mind or disciplines of the will. It was only when he traded worldly pleasure for the all surpassing happiness that can only be found in Jesus that he was fully and finally free.

Oh dear brothers and sisters who struggle with temptations and sins – which is all of us. It is not only possible, ***it is necessary to break free from those shackles*** – take it from one who was bound by ongoing struggles for many long and shadowy years. But you will never be really and truly free until you embrace Jesus as the ultimate treasure of your heart and life – until you finalize this exchange and stop looking for happiness in your flesh, finding it instead in Christ alone.

Rely on Jesus as your source of happiness and secondly as your only Hope. What is your HOPE for salvation? ***What are you trusting in to get you to heaven?*** So many people are hoping and trusting in their own feeble efforts, and it makes them very uneasy because they know deep down those efforts don't amount to a hill of... beans. Like Martin Luther they may work and work, struggle and strive, but in the end they pronounce as he did, ***“Who knows whether it is so?”*** You can never be sure you've done enough if your hope is in yourself and your own efforts.

Paul writes in v. 8 ***“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.”***

Are you depending on your own righteousness? Is your confidence in your own efforts and works you perform? Or are you trusting fully and joyfully in the righteousness of Jesus Christ applied to you by FAITH ALONE?

The key to “gaining Christ” is being found IN HIM: belonging to Him; being so identified with Jesus that you can say “to live is Christ and to die is gain.” Have you abandoned all hope in yourself, realizing that the ship of your life is sinking in the turbulent ocean of your desires and sins? Have you thrown yourself completely on the mercies of Jesus – letting Him pull you into the lifeboat of His finished work so that He can declare you righteous IN HIM?

Are you IN CHRIST? Or are you still IN YOUR SIN? Those are the only two possible conditions. Is Jesus your HOPE? Or are you still trusting – even a little – in yourself?

Rely on Jesus as your happiness, your hope and **also as your HELP.** Depend completely on His resurrection power. V. 10 ***“That I may know Christ and the power of his resurrection.”***

So we have come full circle – considering again the OBJECT of our faith. Are we truly and completely trusting in Christ alone, or are we resting the weight of our faith on our own insights and efforts?

This point shows that faith is not just about the moment you were saved – that single point in time when you trusted in Jesus to take away your sins. Faith is daily and ongoing dependence – it

is trusting in Jesus for every breath we take, every moment we live. It is growing to increasingly know and experience the power that raised Jesus from the dead – trusting in HIS infinite power instead of in OUR very limited strength.

Lean forward in your chair. Shift your weight forward so that your legs are holding you up. The young folks here could probably hold that position for a couple of minutes without the chair at all. Those of us who are a little older and humbler know better. Do you feel the burn?

Now, if you are holding up some portion of your own weight, can you honestly say that you are trusting completely in the chair underneath you? No. You are only trusting that chair part way.

That is often how we treat Jesus. We trust him. We are glad he is under us. In a crisis and more or less when we HAVE TO, we fall down on Him but it's really more of a last resort. We almost want Jesus more as a safety net than as a moment by moment power source. "I'll handle most of today, Lord, and I'll give you a shout if I need anything!"

I want you feel in your leg muscles what that partial faith feels like. Now, ***throw your weight back fully into the chair.*** Lift up your feet and feel the strength of the chair holding you up. By shifting forward did you add anything to the chair? No. You just wore yourself out for no reason.

But that is exactly what we do as followers of Christ. **We SAY we trust in Jesus but in practice we trust in ourselves.** leaning on our own understanding and our own abilities. I am convinced that most of us are more infected with the Disney theology of "***believe in yourself***" than we want to admit. We may judge the Judaizers of the first century and scoff at circumcision and kosher food laws, but we place a lot of confidence in other things. Do you place some of your confidence in your prayer journal... maybe in your hard work serving your husband or wife... or serving the church?

What gives you confidence? What do you take pride in? Your giving record? Your tough decisions? Your integrity? Your reputation?

Think of it this way... when you hit a rough season and are feeling low you think to yourself, "***At least I have...***" or "***At least I am...***" And that gives you comfort, it builds you up a little. I'm feeling down right now but "at least I am a good mom... at least I am a faithful employee..." I may have messed up that project but at least I still have my looks... My looks are going but at least I'm still thin... I've gained a few pounds this year but at least people still think I'm friendly... I've damaged some relationships this year but at least I know my Bible really well... I haven't read the Bible much lately but at least I am well educated... and so on.

However you fill in that "at least I have" or "at least I am" – that is your BOAST. That is your true confidence – or at least part of it. And that is precisely what Paul warns us against – putting confidence IN THE FLESH instead of in JESUS.

Any of those things MAY be your real signs of God's grace in your life – but NONE of those things are worthy OBJECTS for your faith.

- Don't trust in your prayer journal – trust in Jesus!
- Don't trust in your personality traits or appearance – trust completely in Jesus!

- Don't rest your confidence in your achievements – rest your faith in the finished work of Jesus through his death and resurrection 2,000 years ago.

Make Jesus your only HOPE for salvation!

- Don't fall for the American lie and "believe in yourself" – reject that self-reliant religion and fix your confidence in Jesus, entrust yourself completely and joyfully to HIM!
- Don't rest even an ounce or two of your weight on your own goodness or achievements as if you could earn your way to heaven – entrust yourself fully to Jesus, depending fully on His finished work on the cross and knowing that anything you have done is trash in comparison.

Make Jesus your happiness!

- Don't dig for water in the desert of this world, come to Jesus for the streams of living water only He can give you!
- Don't waste your life pursuing success in physical things – invest your heart and life in loving Jesus and following His call!
- Stop chasing the winds of earthly pleasures – trade in those momentary mists for the all-satisfying, all-surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus the Lord.
- Finally,

Make Jesus your HELP!

- Don't trust in your own abilities and efforts – trust in the resurrection power of Jesus!
- Don't trust in your own insights and understanding – trust in the clear direction and established truth of God's Word right here in the Bible!
- Lean on Jesus, rest in Him, revel in His goodness and rely on His infinite power.

A lot of people in America SAY they believe in Jesus – just as many did when Jesus was traveling around and teaching about his kingdom. But he warned the crowds:

"On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'" Matthew 7:22-23

It's not enough to SAY you believe in Jesus – you have to truly trust in Him alone. My favorite gospel illustration is of being on a sinking ship like the Titanic. As the ship goes down in the icy water, think about who will be saved.

- It's not enough to just know ABOUT the lifeboat;
- It's not enough to believe the lifeboat **could** save you.
- In the end **you have to GET ON the lifeboat.**

A lot of people know ABOUT Jesus and if you pressed them they would say they believe he COULD save them. But in truth, they are not on board with Jesus – they have not actually given their lives to Him. And so they are in danger of exactly this pronouncement from Jesus: "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness."

So what about you? ***Are you trusting completely in Jesus Christ alone to save you?*** Can you think of the time when you got on board with Jesus and surrendered your heart and life completely to Him? Or are you still standing outside the lifeboat, knowing Jesus COULD save you but unwilling to make that full and final commitment to Him?

Dear friend, **entrust yourself completely to Jesus!** That is the only way to peace and life today and forever. ***Jesus alone is the way and the truth and the life – there is no other way to the Father except through Him.*** And everything you could gain in this world is a pile of trash compared to the all-surpassing glory of knowing Christ Jesus the Lord. Trade it all in to gain Christ and be found in him – not having a righteousness of your own, but being clothed in the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ that comes through faith.