

The Greatest Christian Testimony

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I do want to say again what a privilege it is to be here with you again this evening. And, Andrew, I don't know that I've ever had a more warm invitation and gracious invitation than what you extended this evening.

And I do want to thank your wonderful pastor also for this privilege and opportunity. I have walked past this church several times in years past and noted the red door and just so grateful now to be on the inside and to have this opportunity to bring God's Word to you.

If you have your Bibles, I would direct you again to Philippians chapter 3. I think you'll find it very helpful as we look together into God's Word tonight for this message.

As I would put a title on this message from Philippians chapter 3, I would entitle this, the greatest Christian testimony ever given.

Every one of us here tonight needs to have a Christian testimony. A testimony is the account of how we have come to personally know Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

[1 : 1 2] Every good and clear testimony has three parts. Part number one of a good testimony is what my life was like before I was converted to Jesus Christ.

We all entered this world outside the kingdom of God and in need of the new birth. That is why we must be born again. And we all can share with Paul's testimony to one degree or another what our years were like before we entered into a saving relationship with Christ.

A second part of a good testimony is how I came to know Christ as my Lord and Savior. And there must come a defining moment, a defining point in each one of our lives when we come to experience the risen Christ within our own heart and soul and we are brought through the narrow gate that leads to life.

And then the third part of any effective testimony is my life since coming to Christ. Anyone who has committed their life to Jesus Christ begins the exciting adventure of walking with Christ and growing to know Him and growing to become conformed into His very image.

Anyone who comes to know Jesus Christ can never remain the same because Christ is too full of power and too full of grace to allow us to remain the way that we were.

[2 : 5 1] The new birth gives us a new heart and a new mind and a new disposition and puts us on a new path. And as we grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, our lives are significantly transformed from the inside out.

So those are the three parts of a Christian testimony. My life before Christ, we might refer to those as our BC days before Christ.

And then the second part, when we came to know Christ in a personal, individual way. And then the third part, my life since coming to know Christ.

By way of introduction, with that as a template to be laid over your life. Can you remember what your life was like before you came to know the risen Christ?

Can you remember what your life once was like as you walked according to this world? When you once were in the kingdom of darkness, what your life was like when you did not know Christ?

[3 : 59] Perhaps even for some here tonight or one or two. You may still be in that period of your life before knowing Jesus Christ.

And can you remember where you were? What was taking place in your life when you came to know Jesus Christ? Well, tonight I want us to look at the testimony of the Apostle Paul.

And this passage breaks out actually very easily. This is a very easy message to follow because Paul is so clear as he writes.

In verses 4 through 6 we see his life before conversion. We see what his life was like on the outside of the kingdom of heaven.

And then in verses 7 through 9 we see his life at conversion. That life changing, eternity altering, time in his life on the Damascus Road when the risen Christ appeared to him and he suddenly entered into a new and saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

[5 : 12] And then in verses 10 through 14 we see his life after conversion. Well I want us now to look and to see the testimony of Paul.

And as we do I want you to be thinking about your own life and your own testimony that you have. Beginning in verse 4 now I want us to see Paul's life before conversion.

Paul describes his old life before he met Christ. And Paul was very religious. He was as religious as anyone could be, but he was religious but lost.

He was unconverted. Please note in verse 4 he says, if anyone else has mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more. What Paul was saying there, if anyone could be saved by religion.

If anyone could find acceptance with God by his own religiosity, by his own morality, by his own seeking to be acceptable before God, by his own keeping of the law, Paul says I'm at the head of the list.

[6 : 25] Everyone else would have to be in line behind me. He says I far more. If anyone could go to heaven by putting confidence in their own flesh, Paul says I am number one.

And so we will see in an argument from the greater to the lesser. If the apostle Paul could not find acceptance by being religious, neither can anyone in this house tonight or anyone living anywhere in the world.

There are seven things that Paul brings to our attention by way of what he had going for him. Beginning in verse 5 he walks through a litany of things that he once put his confidence in.

Beginning in verse 5 he said that he had the right beginning. He says circumcise the eighth day. That's exactly as the Old Testament had prescribed that a male boy would be circumcised on the eighth day which was a sign that he was a part of the covenant nation and that he had been set apart to God from his very birth.

Paul had the perfect beginning. Someone in our church who said pastor I started coming to church nine months before I was born.

[7 : 46] I've just always been coming to church. And that was Paul. He was just always into religion up to his eyeballs. And then second the right nationality.

He said of the nation of Israel. Paul was born of the chosen people of God. And that is to say he had every privilege in the world to grow up in a nation where he could hear the word of God.

He was not born in Egyptian. He was not born a Babylonian or an Assyrian. But he was privileged by God to be born in the nation Israel, the nation to whom God had sent the prophets.

And then the right pedigree. Now he says of the tribe of Benjamin. And was one of the two elite tribes of the nation Israel.

You remember when the nation divided ten tribes to the north. Only two remained loyal to King David Judah and Benjamin. And Paul can boast that he was born into one of those premier elite tribes.

[8 : 51] In fact the first king of Israel would be born of the tribe of Benjamin. And Paul was named Saul. And he was named for that very king.

If anyone could claim to be a spiritual blue blood. If anyone could claim to have a spiritual lineage and pedigree that would have gained him entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

It was the apostle Paul. And then he talks about the right upbringing. Note he goes on to say a Hebrew of Hebrews. There can't be any more Hebrew than a Hebrew of Hebrews.

That's being a Hebrew on steroids. He was born of Hebrew parents. He was raised according to Hebrew tradition. He learned the Hebrew language. He was a die hard Hebrew.

And then he had the right standard. Notice he goes on to say as to the law of Pharisee. And the Pharisees were the most committed religious people in all of Israel.

[9 : 57] They were Bible believing. And they were fiercely committed to the law. And Paul knew his Bible inside out. He was virtually a walking Bible.

There were some 6,000 Pharisees within the nation Israel. Those who were the most zealous, who were the most devoted, who were the most committed to the things of God.

And that's how Paul grew up. And then in verse 6 he had the right passion. Notice he says as to zeal a persecutor of the church.

Paul did nothing half-hearted. Paul was all in no matter what he did. And when he was on the broad path headed for destruction he was all in. And he was zealous in his pursuit of his own self-righteousness.

He was fired up about spiritual things. He was sincere as anyone could possibly be. The problem was he was sincerely wrong in his zeal as he sought to persecute the church.

[11 : 07] And then finally he had the right morality. We'll note at the end of verse 6. He says as to the righteousness which is in the law found blameless.

As you would stand back and look at the life of Saul of Tarsus before he was converted, you would say that is the most righteous man I've ever seen on the outside.

He was outwardly moral. He was externally upright. He was a spiritual straight arrow as much as anyone could possibly be.

Paul had everything going for him. Everything except the most important thing. He had everything except Jesus Christ.

He had the right beginning, the right nationality, the right lineage, the right upbringing. The right standard. The right passion.

[12 : 14] The right morality. If anyone could go to heaven by having a great start growing up in religion, exposure to the Word of God, knowing everything in the Bible, living a pure and moral life, if anyone could go to heaven that way.

The apostle Paul says that would have been me. But the fact of the matter is religion never saved anyone.

Not even a religion dominated by the Word of God. Not even a religion in which one would grow up hearing the Word of God being ministered to them.

The fact is, hell is full of religious people. Hell is full of sincere, outwardly moral people who have thought by their own striving after righteousness that they could find acceptance before God.

I wonder if that could be true of anyone here tonight. I wonder if there is anyone here tonight who is still yet looking to themselves in their own efforts and their own striving to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps in order to find acceptance with God.

[13 : 35] And I want you to know, except your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Now I want you to see the second part of Paul's testimony. We've considered before conversion and just how lost Saul was.

And let me add this before we move on. The hardest person in the world to reach with the gospel of Jesus Christ is a religious person who is unconverted.

No one can be saved until they know they're lost. And no one will truly seek after God until they've come to the end of themselves. And what a miracle it was for Saul of Tarsus to be converted.

Every conversion is a miracle under the grace of God. But none more so than what we read here in Philippians chapter 3.

[14 : 36] So beginning in verse 7, Paul gives us his conversion, his conversion testimony in coming to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

And just by way of background, let me just remind you that what is in the backdrop of these verses. Is that time in Acts chapter 9?

Saul of Tarsus is on the Damascus Road. He has letters in hand to go to Damascus and to apprehend the Christians, those who are members of the way, to lay hold of them physically and to bring them back to Jerusalem to stand trial and to perhaps even bring about their own martyrdom just like with Stephen in Acts chapter 7 when Paul stood there and Stephen was stoned to death.

And it was on that Damascus Road, we read in Acts chapter 9, that suddenly there was a bright light that appeared at noon day. It was brighter than 10,000 lights in the sky above.

It was the glory of God. It was the glory of the risen Christ as Jesus Christ himself appeared to Saul of Tarsus.

[15 : 59] And Jesus Christ knocked Saul off his high horse and put him on the ground until Saul of Tarsus looked up and said, Who are you, Lord?

Saul answered his own question. Who are you, Lord? And in that moment Saul of Tarsus submitted and surrendered his life to the risen Christ.

He sovereignly entered into a saving relationship with Christ. He wasn't even looking for Christ, but Christ was looking for him. And Christ pursued him just as Christ has pursued every one of us who know him here tonight.

And so he became a trophy of God's grace. In that dramatic moment Saul personally met the risen living Christ. He was apprehended by Christ.

He was laid hold of by the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth and immediately became a true believer in Christ and became a follower of Jesus Christ.

[17 : 16] Now he gives us his testimony beginning in verse 7. And I want us to give careful attention to this testimony beginning in verse 7 because it will be the very same testimony of everyone here tonight who is in Christ.

The circumstances will be different with all of us. But the reality of what Paul says here is true of every true believer in Jesus Christ.

So we read in verse 7, but Martin Lloyd-Jones has said, praise God for the but in the Bible. But whatever things were gained to me, and when he says whatever things were gained to me, he's referring to that entire list in verses 4 through 6.

All of his religiosity, all of his morality, all of his self-righteousness, all of his efforts to try to gain a right standing before God, he said, whatever things were gained to me, whatever it was he was putting his trust in, to commend him before God, he said, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

I want you to note three words here in verse 7 that are critically important. They're all accounting terms. And Paul is giving us testimony here in mathematical language.

[18 : 49] Notice the word gain, the word counted, and the word loss. When I was in college, I was a finance major, and I learned early on how to read a profit and loss statement.

I was taught how to read a spreadsheet. It's like a T-square, and on one side are your assets or your profits, and on the other side are your liabilities or your losses.

And as Paul looked at his life, he said, for all of those years, on the asset side, as I itemized everything that I had going for me that would buy my way to heaven, that would commend me to God, all of this right lineage and right nationality and right upbringing and right standard and right passion, all of that was once on the asset side of his life.

As he looked at himself in the mirror and tried to size up what he had going for him, he listed all of this on the asset side.

Well the day he met Jesus Christ, and in that moment when he met Christ, everything that he had once trusted in, everything that he thought he had going for him, he immediately saw the spiritual bankruptcy of it, that it was not worth anything, and in that moment he transferred everything that was on the asset side, it was moved over to the liability side.

[20 : 40] And there was one journal entry written on the asset side, and that one journal entry is Jesus Christ, my Lord, in whom are hidden all the treasures of redemption and salvation and the forgiveness of sin, in whom is found all of the righteousness that a sinner would need to be clothed with, to stand before God and to be accepted into the presence of an infinitely holy God.

There can be no other journal entry on the asset side except Solas Christos, Christ alone, not Christ in anything else, not Christ in my baptism, not Christ in my church membership, not Christ in my good works, Jesus Christ alone, and anything and everything else must be considered as loss in order to gain Christ.

So look at verse 7 again, that's exactly what Paul is saying, and this is what you must say tonight, but whatever things were gained to me, that includes everything that he thought, once thought was gained.

Those things I have counted, and this word counted is used three times in verses 7 and 8, and it speaks of spiritual arithmetic, as Paul has done the math on this and he's added it up.

These things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

[22 : 35] Everything that Paul once thought to be a prophet immediately became a loss, and Paul declared spiritual bankruptcy before God that he might have the riches of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Look at verse 8, he now repeats it like a carpenter driving the nail into the board, yet deeper to fasten this to our minds, lest there be any misunderstanding in anyone's mind here tonight.

Paul now restates what he just said in verse 8, more than that, I count all things.

You know what all things means? All things. Paul means what he says and said what he meant. I count all things to be loss of no spiritual value whatsoever to find salvation, to be loss in view of the surpassing value, the infinitely surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

To know Christ is far more than to merely know about Him. Listen, I know about Winston Churchill I never met him.

[24 : 12] I know about John Knox I've never met him. There must come a time when you do far more than just know about the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth.

There must come a defining time in your life when you come to know personally, experientially, intimately, inwardly, spiritually, savingly the living risen Christ.

That is what Paul says. And at the end of verse 80 he says, for whom, the whom refers to Christ, I have suffered the loss of all things.

I want to ask you tonight, have you suffered the loss of all things? Have you cleared the books in your life? Everything that you once were trusting in to find acceptance with the holy God in heaven, have you declared it to be all bankrupt in order that you may gain by faith Jesus Christ?

And then Paul at the end of verse 8 speaks in such graphic language. He says and count them everything that he once trusted in, his education, his learning, his reputation, his ministry, his morality, his righteousness, his position, his prestige.

[25 : 46] He says I count them but rubbish. The word rubbish here means trash, garbage, waste, even human waste.

I count it all to be but trash so that I may gain Christ.

That's what happens at the time of conversion. A person comes to meet Christ, sees the glories and the riches of his grace, and is like that person who sees a treasure in a field and sells all that he has, just sells out that he may gain this treasure and this treasure is Jesus Christ my Lord.

Not that he may be purchased with gold and silver but it does require the liquidation of our lives and it does require the total sell out of our soul to Christ where we give him every inch and every ounce of us, we commit all that we are to all that he is.

That is what it is to be converted to Jesus Christ. And he says in verse 9, it may be found in him, may be found in Christ.

[27 : 17] That means before he was outside of Christ, now he is in Christ. Since he was a stranger of Christ, now he is a subject of the king.

And may be found in him, now note this, not having a righteousness of my own. Self-righteousness will not give us acceptance with God.

Isaiah 64 verse 6, all of our righteousness is as filthy rags in his sight.

May be found not having a righteousness of my own derived from the law, but that, referring to the righteousness of Christ, but that which is through faith in Christ.

I have faith in Jesus Christ involves my mind that I know the truth of the gospel, that I know that I'm a sinner, that I know he is a savior.

[28 : 22] John Newton at the end of his life began to lose his mind. Sometimes he would lose his memory in the pulpit and there was one sentence that he could always recall when he lost his train of thought in the pulpit.

And John Newton, the writer of Amazing Grace would often say this as he was searching for the next thing he was supposed to say, I know two things.

I know that I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great savior. I hope tonight you know that you are a great sinner, you've been weighed in the balances and you've been found wanting and the wages of sin is death.

And we have a great savior in Jesus Christ our Lord. Though the wages of sin is death, the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

We have to know that in our mind. We have to be convinced and convicted of it in our soul and then with our will. There must be the surrender of our will and the entrustment of our lives to Jesus Christ.

[29 : 34] In other words, not just think about him, not just be persuaded, even the demons tremble in fear, knowing who he is. But as an act of our will, we must place our lives in his saving hands and entrust ourselves to him.

He says, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.

This righteousness which comes from God, Martin Luther called it a foreign righteousness, an alien righteousness, a righteousness that does not originate from within me by the life that I would live.

But it is a righteousness that must come down from above, given to the one who believes in Jesus Christ.

Righteousness is not a reward for the righteous. It is a gift for the guilty. And we must say to him, Lord Jesus, in my hands no price I bring.

[30 : 54] Only to thy cross I cling. Has this happened in your life? Have you come to the time just like Saul of Tarsus, where you have come to see that your righteousness is as filthy rags before the all-seeing holy eyes of God?

Have you come to see that the Lord Jesus Christ is a Savior of sinners who offers his perfect righteousness to those who believe upon him?

Have you done the math on this? Everything that you once trusted in to commend you to God, have you seen that it is waste, that it is garbage, that it is trash, it is unclean in the sight of God?

Have you come to see through the sinless life and the substitutionary sin-bearing death of Christ that there in Christ alone is a perfect righteousness by which you may be clothed to stand faultless before the throne of God above?

Have you made this one journal entry by faith and said, I believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord?

[32 : 20] Time does not permit really to finish this, but verses 10 through 14 is after conversion. You can read this on your own when you are home tonight, but you'll see there is a new priority in everyone who commits their life to Christ that I may know him.

There's a new power in verse 10 in the power of his resurrection, and there's a new persecution, the fellowship of his sufferings, and there's a new pursuit beginning in verse 12 and following.

I press on toward the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. That is the testimony of every one of us here tonight who are in Christ.

That is the template. That is the overlay that can be placed over our lives if we're truly a Christian. And what a powerful witness it is to give our testimony to others.

Paul gave this very testimony before kings and before rulers in the book of Acts, and it was a powerful evangelistic tool as he spoke to others of what his life was once like before Christ, how he came to know Christ, and how his life has been dramatically changed since then.

[33 : 40] I want to encourage you to give your testimony and tell others of what God through his Son, Jesus Christ, has done in your life.

As I conclude, I want to say this, if you have never come to see that all that you would be, all that you have trusted in, and your own efforts, and your own religion, and your own morality, and your own self-righteousness, it is, it must be considered loss, not gain loss, not gain loss.

It must be written off the books and transferred over to the liability side. I call upon you tonight, if you have never believed in Jesus Christ, to call upon the name of the Lord and surrender and commit your life to him.

And in that one moment, the righteousness of Christ will be credited to your account. It will be deposited to your account. And in your account in heaven, in which you have been a spiritual pauper to this point, having no righteousness of your own, the moment you call upon the Lord, all of the riches of the righteousness of Jesus Christ will be immediately transferred to your account, deposited into your account, and throughout the rest of your life, and throughout all of the ages to come, you will have the perfect righteousness of God in Christ because of the sin-bearing death of Christ upon the cross.

God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

[35 : 33] Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Let us pray. Our Father in heaven, how we praise you that you have given to us that which we have lacked and do not have, a perfect righteousness through your Son, Jesus Christ.

We praise you that he was born under the law and he kept every point of the law by his active obedience, that his active righteousness might become credited to us.

And we thank you that upon Calvary's cross he completed the righteousness that was needed for us as he bore our sins upon the cross and suffered in blood and died in our place.

Father, thank you that you would offer this to us freely by your grace and that you even give the faith to lay hold of Christ. Father, we are the most blessed people on the face of the earth for you have clothed us with the perfect righteousness of Christ.

You have deposited into our account the riches of 10,000 kingdoms in the person of Christ. Father, we pray this in Jesus' name.

[36 : 54] Amen.