

“Joy Ride: Joy in our Confidence”



Back in my sales days I thought it was important to drive a nice vehicle. After all, I spent a lot of time on the road, my car was like my second office.

And not only that, I often took customers out for lunch or to visit their other locations, and if I drove an old clunker, it would say something about me and the company I worked for.

I wanted them to see that I was successful. I wanted them to know that I was a “go-getter.” And, I thought a nice car was the way to do that.

So, when the time came, I decided I needed to upgrade a little. I wanted a car that would match my growing status as a senior sales rep. And I had a long list of wants and needs.

For instance, the car had to be able to tow a trailer. One of the things I sold was large motorized cleaning equipment, and I often needed to trailer the equipment for demonstration purposes. I also wanted a vehicle that could hold 6-7 people, especially as we were thinking of starting a family.

But I also wanted a little bit of luxury. Leather seats would be nice, a good entertainment system, a comfortable ride. Because I was going to spend a lot of time in the thing.



Well, after shopping around, we settled on a Chrysler Pacifica. It was a nice vehicle. It was powerful, it rode nicely, and it was decked out with all the luxuries you could possibly want.



Well, we finally got to the part of the buying process where we were no longer talking to a sales guy, but we were talking to a finance guy. We were all set to finalize the deal.

“Mr. Putnam,” he said, “Let me be frank, this is a North American vehicle, and I think you would be smart to consider an extended warranty.” He went on, “Trust me, at some point, something major going to go wrong, and you’re going to want a good warranty to cover it.”

Well, what did that mean? I had found the perfect vehicle that met all of my criteria, but now I was being told it was junk? My confidence in my decision was suddenly deflated.

...By the way, he was right. The transmission eventually went, about six months after the great extended warranty we bought had expired.



I think it’s natural to put our confidence in these things. We’re emotional people. We get emotionally invested.



A friend of mine started out his career working for a company called Nortel. His father had worked for a subsidiary of the same company, had a good career, retired and collecting a decent pension. Back then, it was a great job, with lots of perks. It seemed that there was no stopping this remarkable company.

At it’s peak it was worth about a third of all the companies listed on the Toronto Stock Exchange, employing 94,000 people worldwide.

But, in 2009, Nortel filed for bankruptcy protection in Canada and the United States, triggering an 80% decline in the value of its corporate stock. My friend not only lost his job, but he also lost his life savings. He ended up living in his in-law’s basement. What once seemed like a “sure thing” was now nothing but a heap of financial smoldering rubble.

But then, some of us know, either from past-experience or from observation, that you can’t count on other people. You can’t put your confidence in anything but yourself.

One of the most common misconceptions that Christians have is that it's up to us to us to make it. That we can get into God's good books by being "good people." If we just keep our head down, stay out of trouble, work hard, raise a good family, live virtuous lives, we'll be alright.



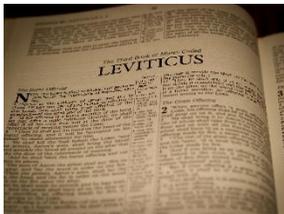
For some this has a religious flavor, and for others it doesn't. But either way, we count our good deeds – "I did it for God," or "I did it for you." I hear it all the time. "I didn't go to church much, but I've lived a good life," they say, "Surely that's what really matters." It's as if God owes them or something.

Well, this morning we're continuing in our summer series on the letter to the Philippians. And this morning Paul is addressing a very specific situation in the Philippian church.

"Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh."
- Philippians 3:2-4

"Watch out!" he warns. "Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh."

What on earth is Paul on about here? Well, here's where this text, on the surface, doesn't seem to apply to us. The church in Philippi is a healthy church, but in Paul's opinion it's under attack.



In Paul's absence other teachers have come who are preaching a different kind of gospel. They're teaching that the gospel of Jesus Christ is only effective in so much as the gentiles become Jews (and start obeying the law). And circumcision is the first step.

In other words, the gospel, which is God's grace-filled action through Jesus Christ, atoning for all sin for all people, in and of itself isn't enough. You need the gospel plus the law of Moses. But Paul isn't having any of it.

I wonder if we don't, on some level, believe this too. I mean Jesus and his cross and resurrection are good and all, but we also need to live "pretty good lives" don't we? Surely, some event two thousand years ago can't be enough? Surely, we need to contribute a little of our own effort?

I mean, that's just how the world works isn't it? Good things come to those who earn it?



Well, apparently not. And to explain, Paul turns the spotlight on himself. Because he's got all the right boxes checked! Circumcised on the eighth day (in other words born an Israelite), He's the right ethnicity, He's the right culture, he's got the right kind of job (A Pharisee – who are known for their obsession with the law), he's done the right things, he's got the right morals. But...ready for this? It's all garbage!

Actually, it's worse than that. This is the only place that I know of in the New Testament where there's a swear word. The translators of my Bible have softened the actual Greek word, and chosen the word "garbage." But the actual word is not so family friendly. All of Paul's self-made righteousness is "excrement." Its crap compared to Christ's completed work on the cross.

"I consider them 🐞 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**"

- Philippians 3:8-11

Paul says, "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."

In other words, following Jesus means a change in our whole way of valuing our lives. What do you do with your pride? What do you do with your own agenda? What do you do with your own selfishness? What do you do with your own independence? You take it to the dump. You let it go, because suddenly you have realized that it is worthless in light of Jesus.



But it's still so tempting isn't it? I admit, I'm tempted. I've lived my life trying to make all the right choices – setting myself up for a certain kind of success – a commerce degree, nice vehicle, married, home owner, tax payer, church goer, a variety of hobbies and interests. You name it, I've invested in all these "right things" that our culture says makes you worthy. I've tried to check all the right boxes.



But the more I learn about Jesus, the more I see things differently. It's not all that long ago that I was shopping for luxury cars to impress clients. And I still have my weaker moments, but something's happened. Suddenly, that stuff doesn't interest me as much as it once did. What used to motivate me, seems pointless now. Maybe that's what Paul is on about here.



Fred Craddock tells the story of a missionary family in China who was forced to leave the country sometime after the communists took over.

One day a band of soldiers knocked on the door and told this missionary, his wife, and children that they had two hours to pack up before these troops would escort them to the train station.



They would be permitted to take with them only two hundred pounds of stuff. Thus began two hours of family wrangling and bickering over what should they take. What about this vase? It's a family heirloom, so we've got to take the vase.

Well, maybe so, but this typewriter is brand new and we're not about to leave it behind.

What about some books? Got to take a few of them along. On and on it went, putting stuff on the bathroom scale and taking it

off until finally they had a pile of possessions that totaled two hundred pounds on the dot.

At the appointed hour the soldiers returned. "Are you ready?" they asked. "Yes." "Did you weigh your stuff?" "Yes, we did." "Two hundred pounds?" "Yes, two hundred pounds on the dot."

"Did you weigh the kids?" "Um, . . . no." "Weigh the kids!" And in an instant the vase, the typewriter, and the books all became garbage. Trash! None of it meant anything compared to the surpassing value of the children.

Suddenly what had previously been of value to us comes to mean absolutely nothing— only too happy to leave it behind because something else is worth so much more.

"God has called me
heavenward in
Christ Jesus."
- Philippians 3:14

Faith is a journey – we're always correcting along the way. Paul says, "God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." That's not so much a geographical destination as it is a way of being; to be called "heavenward" rather than to live focussed on the earthly things that are really no more valuable than dust.



To be a follower of Jesus is to be one who is heading in a particular direction. But as we journey, we pick up things. We make purchases, we try to make something of ourselves and we check off our bucket lists. All these things, although no doubt lovely in their own right, can burden us. Because they can distract us. They convince us that they are what really matters most.

To follow Jesus is to be always evaluating and re-evaluating what's important. It is to come to a point where we can admit that we've been gathering hundreds of pounds of "garbage" while neglecting that which is of greatest importance.

As Reformed Christians, we are called to be reformed and reforming – always examining our lives and faith, questioning our influences and returning to what matters most.



Paul begins his passage this week with the simple words, “Rejoice in the Lord!” Rejoice in what the Lord has done, rejoice in who the Lord is, and rejoice in who you are as a result. “Rejoice in the Lord.”

Gospel singer Billy Fields wrote a song with a line that says, “I didn’t know Jesus was all that I needed until He was all that I had.” And when he is all that we have then we are truly rich.

Thanks be to God, Amen.