

Broken Pieces

Philippians 3:1-11 -

By Russell Muilenburg

Sunday, 22 August 2010 00:00

Philippians 3:1-11 *Broken Pieces* **Growing** After we met with the funeral director last Saturday we went back to mom's house and sorted through the picture books so that we could pick out some photos for the video tribute. And as I looked at all the pictures with the horrible fashions from the '70s and the series of bad haircuts one thing stood out to me:
I was a skinny, little twerp

In fact, the more I looked, the more I remembered how much my lack of size was a part of my identity when I was a little kid. I have a brother who is two years older than me and he was, and continues to be, taller than me. I was generally the shortest boy in my class.

There was even a phase there—about 1

st

or 2

nd

grade—where I was desperate for a nickname and I insisted that everybody call me “Shorty”. I even got a trucker's hat with “Shorty” written on the front. I think I wanted to be the shortest, so people would notice me.

Much to my dismay, though, I grew. As it turns out, I never was particularly short and today I'm pretty much average in size.

And, of course, that's a good thing. The fact that I grew is a good thing. If I really had been abnormally short, my parents would have been worried about me. If I didn't grow taller and gain weight there would have been something wrong. Every parent knows you want your children to grow. Growth is a sign of health.

And as I think about Hope Church over the past year, that's the thing that stands out to me:

we are growing

. God has blessed Hope Church with growth.

Broken Pieces

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There's a number of ways to measure growth in a church. Maybe the most common are the three "B"s:

Bodies, Budget, and Building

. And in all three areas we can see growth.

Under bodies, I had Lynda check and our average attendance for both Sunday services through August 15 last year was 366. This year through the same period it is 400. That's an increase in attendance of

34

, which is right about the 10% increase we've seen the last couple of years. It continues to be exciting to see new faces in worship.

Under budget, we had a church board meeting on Thursday and one of the things that stood out to us is that our offerings through the end of July have totaled

\$26,000

more than the same period last year. Even though we keep hearing about how poor the economy is, you have continued to be generous in your support of the church. We are very grateful for that. While we don't want to take it for granted, the church is in sound financial shape.

And under building, we didn't do any major expansion this year like we have the past few years with phase III or the video system for the Well, but we did furnish the

Fireside and Grace Rooms, re-carpet the youth room, and paint the exterior of the building

. When people come through our building for weddings or special services, I often hear comments about how well maintained our building is.

Plus, there is a fourth way we could measure growth in the church:

Busy-ness

. We are an active church. This year we sent two groups to Haiti. We had our largest Vacation Bible School ever. We had another great turn-out at Trunk-or-Treat and Love Spencer. The youth group had great trips to Tennessee and Power Connection, and we had a powerful Youth Sunday service. We have an active small group ministry. And on and on. The church calendar always seems full.

Broken Pieces

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So, based on Bodies, Budget, Building and Busy-ness—Hope Church is a growing church. God is blessing us as a congregation. I believe those are signs of good health. If we weren't growing, we'd be worried.

But that raises an important question:

Are we growing spiritually?

□

Because, when you get right down to it, that's really the most important thing to know about a church. That's why we are here. To help people connect to Jesus Christ and grow in their relationship with Him. To bring joy to Jesus and experience joy in Him. That's the most important thing about us. And if that's not happening, we're missing the mark.

Having more bodies is great—and it's exciting—but if we aren't growing spiritually we're just adding to the crowd. Having a growing budget is important—much better than the alternative—and it allows us to do more ministry, but if we aren't growing spiritually it's a waste of money. The building is nice, but it's certainly not the point. And we're all plenty busy enough—we don't need the church to make us more busy if it's not helping us connect with the King of the universe.

So the most important question—when it comes to the growth of the church—is: are we growing spiritually?

And of course, it's a harder question to answer. It's one of the reasons we took the Reveal Survey this last January. We're trying to get a handle on where we are at in terms of spiritual growth. It's more subjective than counting bodies or dollars, and yet we need to have some idea of how we are doing in the most important thing we are called to do as a church.

And what we found from that survey—not surprisingly—is that we have room to grow in our relationship with Christ.

This is Important

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Last year at this service—the vision Sunday we held at the park—we set the goal for the year of taking the next step in our relationship with Jesus. I don't know if you remember it—but we had four people on stage representing the four stages of relationship with Jesus: Exploring Christ, Growing in Christ, Close to Christ, and Christ-Centered. And the challenge was for us all to try to identify where we were, and what it would take to move to the next step.

And I hope that helped you—but as I look at the year ahead I really feel the goal for us has to be the same. I feel like we need to keep focusing on spiritual growth. We need to all continue to take the next steps in our relationship with Jesus.

Next week, at the Events Center, I'm going to lay out a plan and a challenge for how we can all do that. I'm going to give us all a very specific next step.

But for this week, I want you to see that this is, in fact, important. Today, I want us to see the surpassing greatness of knowing Jesus. I want us to see that

EVERYTHING pales in comparison to Jesus Christ

. That nothing is more important than growing in our relationship with Him.

And to see that, we're going to look together at Philippians 3:1-11. Here the Apostle Paul shows how valuable Jesus is to him, and to us. He models for us, in his own heart, how we should relate to Christ today.

Here's the passage,

Philippians 3:1-11

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1

Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.

Broken Pieces

Philippians 3:1-11 -

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Sunday, 22 August 2010 00:00

2

Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh.

3

For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—

4

though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put 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; in regard to the law, a Pharisee;

6

as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

7

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

8

What is more, 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

9

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 and is by faith.

10

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

11

and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Knowing Jesus

As I look at this passage, I see three areas where Paul exalts the value of knowing Jesus. Three ways Paul highlights the **surpassing greatness of knowing Christ**.

I. First,

knowing Jesus is greater than our circumstances

. Whatever is happening in your life right now, you can rejoice in your relationship with Jesus.

Broken Pieces

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Sunday, 22 August 2010 00:00

Look again at

verse 1

:

1

Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.

A little back ground here: When Paul wrote this letter, he was in prison. In all likelihood, he is sitting in a jail cell in Rome, chained to a Roman guard, awaiting trial before the Roman Emperor as he writes: "Rejoice in the Lord!" (cf. Phil. 1:12-14)

Plus, we know from elsewhere in Scripture that the Philippians were not exactly thriving. 2 Corinthians 8:2 describes their situation as "severe trial" and "extreme poverty." And yet, Paul urges them to rejoice.

You see, sometimes we let our circumstances pull us away from Jesus. Someone close to you passes away. You get a bad health report from the doctor. Your business is downsizing. Your child is uncooperative. Circumstances can conspire to make it look like God is indifferent, that Jesus doesn't care.

But Paul says we can rejoice. No matter what is happening to us, we should consider Christ so precious, so valuable, such a great treasure, that whether in prison or in affliction or in poverty—whether sick or in grief or consumed with worry--knowing him and belonging to him and being with him forever is a reason for joy.

II. Or, again, we are told that

knowing Jesus is greater than our achievements.□

Whatever we've done—whatever we've accomplished—it is not as important as having a relationship with Jesus.

Broken Pieces

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Sunday, 22 August 2010 00:00

Verse 2

:

2

Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh.

3

For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—

4

though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

Paul is here referencing a recurring problem in the churches that he founded. There were many devout Jews who were willing to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, but believed that for non-Jews (Gentiles) to accept this Jewish Messiah they had to become Jews first. That is: they had to accept and live by the Jewish law-code; the most visible sign of which was the sign of circumcision. So they were pushing a form of Christianity that was really dependent on moral achievements. It was faith in Jesus, plus a little extra. And they tended to boast in their ability to do the “something extra.”

But Paul says this is wrong. We should glory in Christ Jesus, not in our own efforts.

In fact, in verses 4 through 6 Paul points out that if it is a matter moral achievement, he’s got the perfect background:

If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more:

5

circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee;

6

as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

Spiritually speaking, Paul’s resume is perfect. He’s got the right lineage—born into one of only two tribes that stayed loyal to David. He’s got the right training—the Pharisees were like the Harvard of religious schools at the time. And he’s got the right work record—persecuting

Broken Pieces

Philippians 3:1-11 -

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Sunday, 22 August 2010 00:00

Christians and practicing legalistic righteousness. He's like a trust fund baby that goes out and does even better than his parents.

And yet, Paul says, none of that matters compared to knowing Jesus.

We might be tempted to take pride in our spiritual accomplishments: we're in church every Sunday; we volunteer to teach Sunday School; we give generously to charity; we don't swear, don't drink, and don't watch bad movies. We might even be tempted to take pride in the fact that our church is growing in attendance and budget and so on.

But none of that matters compared to knowing Jesus. If we're going to find glory--if we're going to put our confidence in anything—it has to be in what Jesus Christ has accomplished for us.

III. Or third, Paul tells us that
knowing Jesus is greater than all things.

There is nothing in the world more important than knowing Jesus.

Verse 7:

7

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

8

What is more, 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

9

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 and is by faith.

Notice the inclusive words Paul uses here: “whatever was to my profit”; “everything”, “all things”. It's like Paul has one of those old-fashioned scales—the kind you use in science class or they have in courtrooms—and on one side he puts everything in the world and on the other

Broken Pieces

Philippians 3:1-11 -

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Sunday, 22 August 2010 00:00

side he puts Jesus and “the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith”. And it is no contest. Jesus and His righteousness are incomparably better.

In fact, Paul uses a rather coarse word. He says that everything the world has to offer—whether it be his spiritual resume or material wealth or the right network of friends or whatever—everything the world has to offer is rubbish—literally dung—compared to gaining Christ and being found in him.

In verses 10 and 11 Paul leaves no doubt as to what His ultimate goal is:

10

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

11

and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

And Paul’s goal should be ours. We should long to Know Christ. It is the most important thing we are called to as a Church and the most important thing we are called to as Christians.

EVERYTHING pales in comparison to Jesus Christ. Nothing is more important than growing in our relationship with Him.

Broken Pieces

So we wanted to do something today to help us commit to pursuing Jesus like this. Something that would help us all remember that nothing should get in the way of knowing Jesus.

And the image we came up with is that of broken pieces.

I think sometimes we try to present our lives as being all together. Kind of like this tile. We put

Broken Pieces

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Sunday, 22 August 2010 00:00

on this false front that shows people what we want them to see. We want them to think we are strong and on top of things.

But in reality, we're all pretty brittle. (Break tile)

Our lives are really made up of all these broken pieces. The product of circumstances. A list of things we've tried to accomplish on our own. Things we've been pursuing in the world.

And what we need is for Jesus to come and put these broken pieces together. On our own, we're not going to be able to make much of some of the mess in our lives. We need Jesus to make something beautiful out of the brokenness in us.

So what we're going to do is we're going to pass out broken pieces of tile. And I want to encourage you to take a marker and on the back side write down something that might be keeping you from knowing Jesus the way Paul talks about in Philippians 3.

Then the band is going to play a song and you're going to have the opportunity to come up and give that broken piece of yourself over to Jesus. We have mortar boards with wet plaster spread out around the sanctuary—there's one in the Well, one in the balcony, one for each section of the main floor. And we're going to invite you to come forward and place your broken piece into the mortar.

There doesn't have to be a pattern or an order—just put the colored side up. And then we're going to take these boards and try to make something whole out of them.

Just like Jesus takes the broken pieces of our lives and makes something beautiful out of our lives.

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What broken piece do you want to hand over to Jesus?

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