

Philippians 3: 1-11: Rejoice in the Lord's Rescue Plan for Wretches

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I want to start out today by telling you a story, a story that 1.8 billion people around the world consider to be a true story. This story begins 1,407 years ago, in a cave in what is today Saudi Arabia.

In this story, the archangel Gabriel came down from heaven and met a man who was meditating in this cave, bringing with him a new message from God, his final divine revelation to mankind. The archangel met periodically with this man over the next 23 years, delivering this new revelation in stages that were finally compiled into what is today known as the Qur'an. And that man of course was Mohammad.

And every year, devout Muslims from around the world celebrate that supposed event by embarking on a month of fasting, called Ramadan. During this month, which began at the end of May and goes until the end of June, no food or drink are permitted during daylight hours.

Observant Muslims will rise early and eat before sunrise, and will then wait until the sun has gone down to eat or drink again, completely fasting in the intervening time.

There are a range of reasons given for this fasting: to discipline the body, to show gratitude to God for the Qur'an, to identify with the poor who are forced to fast all the time because they don't have enough food. And the proper completion of Ramadan is supposed to bring with it great merit in the eyes of God, and this is perhaps the most important reason, because in Islam the way to heaven is through obedience, through living a life that has on balance more good deeds than bad.

If, when you die, your good deeds outweigh your bad, and you pass the test of the angels who visit you in your grave, you will be admitted into heaven. It is your WORKS of obedience, your EFFORTS at living righteously, that will ultimately carry you across the finishing line of life and on into heaven.

Your fate is entirely in your own hands and rest entirely upon your own hard work, and there are almost 2 billion people who are spending their daylight hours during this month WORKING at attaining their own salvation.

But as we turn from that false story to the true one that lies before us today, we see a very different picture of salvation emerging. We see Paul teaching us that the only way we will make it to the finishing line of life and then on into heaven, is if God himself steps in to carry us, to give us the help we need, to RESCUE us from ourselves.

So, let's turn to today's passage and see how it is that the Apostle Paul reflects back on his own rescue, and instructs us to recognise that we too have been rescued by God and that we should be sure to live in light of the truth that God himself will take us over the finishing line. We are beginning chapter 3 today and are just over half way through our series on St. Paul's epistle to the Philippians. Just to remind you of where we have come so far, today we find ourselves right in the middle of a section where Paul instructs us to Rejoice that the Gospel is Unstoppable, and we come to the first 11 verses of chapter 3, which you heard read a few minutes ago.

Today, we will see yet another reason that Paul gives us to rejoice in the unstoppable Gospel, and I think a good way to summarise his central idea in this passage is this: 'Rejoice in the Lord's Rescue Plan for Wretches.' What we will see in these few verses is Paul laying out for us that we should be rejoicing in the Gospel of the Lord because our rescue, our salvation, comes from God alone, and it does not come from us or anything we have or haven't done – he alone will get us to the finishing line.

And that is certainly a reason for rejoicing!

Specifically, what we will see today from these 11 verses is that Paul is calling us to rejoice, not just in the fact THAT we have been rescued, (though that is amazing enough all on its own!) but to recognise that this salvation should give us incredible joy for three reasons:

- 1) Because of who we were (vv 2-6)
- 2) Because of who we are (vv 7-9); and
- 3) Because of who we are becoming (vv 10-11)

He opens this section of his Epistle with these words, “Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.” So it seems that what is to follow, what we are reading today, is something that he has already communicated to the Philippians but he feels that they need a reminder, and he is happy to give them that reminder. It’s great to see that we are not the only ones who so easily forget the great truths of God, and it pays for us to follow the example of the apostle here and be constantly reminding ourselves of the great truths of Scripture – this is one of the reasons why regular, consistent prayer and bible reading are so important, as is gathering together like we do today.

And it’s interesting the way he words this, “is safe for you”, or as the NASB puts it “is a safeguard for you”.

What makes this reminder a safeguard for them? I think he knows that the church needs reminding of the great truth of the free Gospel, of a salvation that comes purely by God’s grace and not by their own efforts. They need reminding, as we all do, to put no confidence in our ability to rescue ourselves, but to rely purely on God.

To add anything to the finished work of the cross is not just unnecessary, it’s dangerous. It threatens to drag us back into thinking that we are in some measure our own rescuers, that there was something about us and what we’ve done that EARNED our salvation, even if in just some small way. This is the thinking from which Paul seeks to keep them safe.

He does this firstly by reminding them of ‘who they were’.

Let’s look at verses 2-6.

² Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. ³ For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— ⁴ though 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: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

In these verses Paul is reminding them of what they’ve left behind, of the old covenant, the covenant God made with the people of Israel through Moses at Mt Sinai, and he’s setting them up to show that he of all people understood the demands of this law better than anyone.

We can see this here in v2 where he warns them about those who would drag them back into the old ways, back into that which has been fulfilled by Christ.

And don’t let the force of his words escape you: ‘look out for the dogs’ – this is downright offensive language, but the fact that he feels it is necessary to speak with such force should cause us to pay close attention to what follows. He isn’t just warning us of something that might cause us SOME problems, or that is of MINOR importance, he is speaking in the strongest possible terms of those who would bring the Philippians back into the fold of the Law. The contrast at the end of v2 and the start of v3, the discussion over circumcision, makes it almost certain that he’s addressing what we would call the Judaizers, those Jews who taught that to be saved under the New Covenant, you also had to observe the old.

It seems these men were common in the first century, apparently plaguing Paul and his ministry amongst the Gentiles. In fact, this very discussion of circumcision for Gentiles comes up twice in Acts 15 and again in Galatians 5. So what's the big deal about circumcision? Why is it such a recurring theme amongst Paul's ministry?

If you remember back in Genesis 17 we see circumcision being given by God to Abraham as a commandment, as the entry into the covenant He was making with Abraham:

¹⁰This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. ...¹⁴Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."

So we can understand why this issue became so important in the early church – it is a question over who is part of God's covenant people and who isn't. For millennia, to be in the covenant community meant circumcision, and now that the covenant community has been broadened to include Gentiles (non-Jews) some Jewish Christians are saying they need to be marked with the sign of the covenant. When you look at it from that perspective you can see that it makes a certain kind of sense. After all, v14 says that to not be circumcised is to be 'cut off', to be outside the people of God.

But the problem is, these groups had come to believe that the most important thing about following God was the outward observances, the actions and rituals that one followed, and this took priority over what was going on in the heart. In the Gospels, we see this being challenged by Jesus and by John the Baptist as both question that certain groups are really "sons of Abraham" and whether that is enough. Paul takes up this idea here in v3 and lets us know that the true sign of one who is part of God's covenant community is not one who is circumcised outwardly, but inwardly. Look at v3 – "for we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh". Whereas the Judaizers were putting their confidence in the outward, physical sign of inclusion in the covenant of Abraham, Paul here says that the true signs of one who is in right relationship with God is something else: it's worshipping God by his Spirit, it's glorying in Christ Jesus and his work, and it's looking away from ourselves for our confidence. Is that you, today?

Are you glorying solely in what Christ did to rescue you, or are you still clinging to some external work, like baptism, or church attendance as a way of rescuing yourself? Maybe it's good deeds in which you put your confidence – maybe you are like the millions of Muslims I spoke of earlier who think that if you just do enough good deeds you can guarantee yourself a place in heaven. Whatever it is, listen carefully to what Paul has to say in the next three verses.

He tells us in these verses that of all people, he had the most reason to be confident in the flesh, in the outward signs, in the good deeds he did. Let's look at vv4-6 where we see Paul letting us know of his pedigree, of his former standing in the Jewish community. What he's giving us here could be called his 'religious resume', and I can imagine it being given something like this:

If you want someone who has done everything you are supposed to do, who is everything you can possibly be in terms of meeting God's requirements, who has surely earned his way into heaven, I'm your man!

Let me tell you about myself: I was circumcised on the right day, I was born into the people of God, not a foreign convert, I'm a Pharisee (you know, we're the ones who most strictly observed all the requirements of the Mosaic Law). In fact, I'm so driven by my commitment to the Law that I've been persecuting, arresting and killing members of that new Christian church that started up just down the road.

In fact, so confident was he in his observance of all that God had commanded that in today's text he calls himself "blameless", a true "Hebrew of Hebrews". And to top it all off, he also tells us in Galatians chapter 1 that he was "advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers."

If you had this kind of religious resume, you too might think you could rescue yourself!

These few verses are a great reminder to his audience, both then and now, of who each of us was. “But wait a minute,” you say, “I’m not like that. I’m not from the tribe of Benjamin, I’ve not kept the Mosaic Law perfectly – that’s not me he talking about!” You might not exactly fit Paul’s description of himself, but that’s not really his point, is it?

His point is that these are the things in which he placed his confidence regarding his standing before God – the things he had done, the family he was born into. And in that we ARE all like him!

Each of us has looked to ourselves to see how we are doing, to see how ‘good’ we are, to gain confidence in our place before God. Paul does it by comparing himself to the Law, we do it most often by comparing ourselves to others – “I’m not as bad as that guy!” “I’m much better than her!” “I’m a good person.”

And these comparisons don’t always end when we have finally accepted Jesus...we just find other means of comparison. We might look to our observance of Christian rituals as a sign of our right standing before God. Are you baptised? As a Christian you should be, but don’t put your confidence in that baptism to rescue you. Maybe you’ve read your bible every day this week, and you’re tempted to think, “I’m sweet with God!” Well, it’s certainly good that you’ve read your bible every day, but don’t put your confidence in that to rescue you. Whatever it might be in your life, in some way we were all like Paul was, all looking to ourselves to see how we are doing, all trying to save ourselves through OUR deeds and actions.

But is that enough? Can our actions ever be enough to make us right with God? Can we ever actually rescue ourselves? Paul’s point here is clearly NO! The temptation to fall into this trap is very strong, and that’s why these reminders of Paul are “a safeguard” for us.

This recognition of who we were leads him into talking about the next aspect of the Lord’s incredible salvation, and reminds them that they (and us!) should be rejoicing in the Lord’s Rescue Plan because of ‘who they are’.

Look with me at vv7-9:

⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, 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, in order 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 comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

It’s here that he tells us that he has come to understand what he mentioned back in v3, that what matters about his relationship with God is not any of these external things, but something else entirely.

V7, “whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.” Here is a man who was working his way to the top of the heap in his culture, on the fast track to being top dog, a man whose standing in the Jewish community would have been very high and respected.

He’s spent the whole of his life working on this goal, working towards understanding God’s Law and living it out with all his might, but he’s given it all up for something better, for something that will actually rescue him, that will allow him to be in a truly right relationship with God – and that’s Christ Jesus. In v8 he elaborates on this and says that all these things that he had, all his accolades and his standing in the community, the praise of others...

...he now considers all these things to be rubbish compared to knowing Christ. Many of you may already know this, but the word ‘rubbish’ in v8 literally means ‘to throw to dogs’, like the scraps of food that no human wants to eat, and it is also used figuratively to refer to what your neighbour’s dog left on your front lawn this morning.

Paul is telling us that all his life’s work, all his hard work, all his achievements: compared to Christ, they are only fit to be thrown to dogs. Can you image that? Can you imagine what that might look like in your own life? To spend your whole life working towards something, a career goal for instance, to achieve all that you’ve wanted and worked for, and then realise that it is all actually worthless? That’s it’s only fit to be scrapped of your shoe with a stick!

So let me ask you: what is it that is most important in your life? Is it your career? Your business? Marriage? Your appearance? Bank account? What is it that you put your confidence in? If it's not the Lord Jesus Christ...it's dung! Cast it from you and turn to him!

But why? you might ask. What's so bad about trying to rescue ourselves? And why do we need rescuing, anyway? Paul tells us why in v9.

His motivation for what he's done is clear – he wants to be found in Christ, for his confidence and value to come from Christ, not from himself.

“Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness of GOD that depends on faith.” Whatever tiny little scraps of righteousness we might be able to pull together on our own, they're meaningless compared to the righteousness God requires. He requires us to be perfect! Absolutely spotless and blameless! You can try to clothe yourself in the rags of your righteous deeds if you want, but when you stand before God and demand your reward you will be shown for what you really are, I will be shown for what I really am if I don't have Christ: a wretched sinner, a breaker of God's law, clinging tightly to what I think is righteous, what I think is enough to rescue me from God's anger at my sin and grant me entrance into eternity with him. But it won't be enough.

The Prophet Isaiah described our righteous deeds as being nothing more than filthy menstrual rags! Can you imagine it? Standing before the holy, sinless, righteous God after you die and holding out to him your filthy, stained garments and saying, “Here is my righteousness. This is enough to rescue me from your judgement.” How do you think that will turn out?

This is why Paul here reminds us of who we ARE: we are clothed in the righteousness of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what theologians call the Great Exchange, and it refers to what we celebrated a few weeks ago at Easter.

On the cross, Jesus endured the wrath of God that should have been mine, and should have been yours. As he hung there, God treated him as though he was guilty of all the sins you and I have committed, of all the sins that everyone who will put their trust in Christ have committed and will ever commit. 2 Corinthians 5:21 explains this wonderfully when it says:

²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Do you see the exchange that took place on the cross? Do you see his rescue plan?

He exchanged his righteousness for our guilt. He was treated as though he was guilty of our sin, and in exchange we will be treated as though we have his righteousness. And his righteousness is not like the righteousness that Paul thought he had, and it's not like the righteousness that you get from fasting during Ramadan.

It's true righteousness! It's the righteousness of God himself! Of the second person of the Trinity, holy and blameless. It's the righteousness of this one who wrapped himself in flesh and lived a perfect life. It's the righteousness of the sinless, spotless Lamb of God who went to a criminal's death for you and me, to save us from ourselves, to do for us what we could never even get close to doing on our own! This truly is a Great Exchange!

But it doesn't end there.

Not only did he take on himself the guilt for our sin; not only did he suffer the righteous wrath of God in our place; not only did he exchange our filthy garments of self-reliance for the purity of his righteousness; he allowed us to be adopted into the family of God.

Paul elaborates on this idea in Romans 8:

¹⁵For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

We must try to understand the significance of this event: when God looks at those who have trusted in Christ he no longer sees sinners carrying around the stains of their sins. What he sees are his children clothed in Christ’s righteousness. Because of this we can live in peace with God, and we can call him Father, we can call him ‘dad’.

Remember the first line of the Lord’s prayer: “our Father, who is in heaven”. Such intimacy with God! No longer is he just a king and we his subjects, rebellious subjects, but he is now also our father. All of this took place at the cross as God’s rescue plan.

J I Packer captures it wonderfully when he says, “Adoption is the highest privilege of the gospel. The traitor is forgiven, brought in for supper, and given the family name.

This is the “righteousness that comes from God” that Paul speaks of in v9, and the way we get it is at once both incredibly easy and incredibly difficult. It’s incredibly easy because all we need to do is put our faith, our trust, in Christ. But it’s incredibly difficult because we have to put aside all the other things in our lives that we have been putting our confidence in, the many things to which we cling so tightly.

Do you need to do that? Do you need to stop striving to attain righteousness on your own? Do you long to move from being a rebellious subject of God to being his son, or his daughter? Do you need to put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ?

If so, don’t go home today still clothed in your filthy rags – come and talk to me after the service. Talk to the one who brought you here today. Talk to one of the Elders or pastors here about how you can stop working at pleasing God on your own and can simply rest in the finished work of Jesus. Go home clothed in the perfect righteousness of Christ himself!

And if you have already done that, if you have recognised the inability we each have to please God on our own and are able to rejoice in the rescue plan of the Lord, Paul has some words here at the end of our section for you, and he tells us here that we should be rejoicing not just because of who we were, nor just because of what we now are, but also because of who we are becoming.

Let’s read vv 10-11:

¹⁰that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

This phrase ‘to know’ is much more than what we might mean today when we say that. When we say we ‘know’ something, we are usually talking about how we understand a thing – I know my times tables, I know how to fix the car, etc. But in the Bible, it is often used to describe marriage and sex, as in ‘Adam knew his wife and she bore a son’. And what it means is not sex itself, but the deep, intimate union that sex creates when God’s ideals for it are met. To know, in the Biblical sense, is to EXPERIENCE. In a similar way, what Paul is speaking of here at the start of v10 is that he wants to EXPERIENCE Christ, that he wants a deep, intimate union with Christ. And this is something that all of us who have trusted in Christ should desire.

We are not to simply sit contentedly, having received the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus, but to strive to be like him in every way. HE saved us. HE rescued us. HE died for us! And to live life in the shadow of the Great Exchange is to enter into a deep and intimate relationship with him that will shape the rest of our lives!

What does this look like? What does a life modelled after Christ involve? What is this new life in which Paul is calling us to rejoice?

We saw in chapter 2 that Christ's life was one that descended: he descended from heaven into humanity, and from humanity he descended into death, but it was through death back into life and to the glory of the ascension back to heaven – this is 'the power of the resurrection'. This is what we should be rejoicing in!

But we must ask ourselves, should our lives look much different? Should it not involve the same experiences? It should! Why are we surprised when difficulties come our way? Was the life of our Lord not difficult, filled with sufferings and trials? Didn't he teach us that these things would also be ours?

After all, what did Jesus say in John 15? That if the world hated him, it would also hate us! Why does the world hate us so? What is it about the message of Christ that they find so intolerable?

Paul tells us in his second letter to the Corinthians chapter 2:

¹⁵ For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, ¹⁶ to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life...

Make no mistake, brothers and sisters: when we carry Christ with us into the world, his aroma to those who are dead in their sins is of death itself! It is the stench of their own evil, the stench of the wrath of God that burns against them for their sins!

It is the light of Christ shining into the dark recesses of their lives and exposing their shameful deeds. This is what they hate – it is not us, but it is the one we serve.

And as long as we serve faithfully, we will be the objects of scorn; the life of a Christian was never supposed to be easy. It is certainly true that some seem to experience this hardship more than others, and even though those of us here in the west experience it least of all, we are seeing Christian persecution on the rise. Consider these headlines from just the last few months:

The Australian Christian Lobby headquarters in Canberra was attacked by a car bomb in December last year.

In March this year, the LGBT lobby made public that Mark Allaby, an executive with IBM in Sydney, was a member of the Lachlan Macquarie Institute, a Christian institute dedicated to training young Christian leaders. Because of the Institute's stand for Biblical sexuality, which is not consistent with IBM's stated stance in favour of same-sex marriage, their bullying tactics forced him to resign from the Institute's board. And consider this: in 2016, when he was an executive at PricewaterhouseCoopers, he was forced to resign from the board of the Australian Christian Lobby (and ultimately PWC) for the same reason! Because he holds a biblical view of sexuality, which clashes with his employer's stated views, he cannot be a member of Christian groups.

Finally, just before Easter this year, on a train in Sydney, a Christian man and his girlfriend were beaten by Muslims because he was wearing a cross around his neck. They ripped it off him, trampled it on the floor of the train, and beat them both, all the while saying obscene things about Jesus.

If you think that living in Australia will make you immune to suffering for the sake of Christ, you need to think again.

"But, Dave," you might be thinking, "you told us to rejoice in who we are becoming – what's to rejoice in? Persecution and suffering? If it's all the same with you, I think I'll pass on that!"

Well, let's return to our text, to v10, and see what lies at the heart of our rejoicing, because it is in this verse we see Christ-like suffering and resurrection power going hand-in-hand.

And did you notice here in our passage that Paul speaks first of Christ's resurrection, and only secondly of his death? But death came first, so why is he reversing the order? Certainly, it is true FOR CHRIST that death came before the resurrection, but for those who follow him, WE first experience the power of the resurrection before we share in his death. And it must be so – for how else could we endure if not by the power of the resurrection at work in us, strengthening us and allowing us to overcome?

Paul demonstrates this nicely in 2 Corinthians, chapter 4:

⁸We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. ¹¹For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

Can you see what he's saying here? Though we go through trials and sufferings, we don't lose hope. We are not defeated. We maintain our joy! Why? Because the life of Jesus, the life of his resurrection, is made manifest in us!

Do you remember last week that Tim quoted Ps John MacArthur as saying this:

The Christian's joy is the deep and abiding confidence that, regardless of one's circumstances in life, all is well between the believer and the Lord." Our rejoicing as Christians flows out of this reality!

This is what Paul is saying – the trials and testing, the sufferings in whatever form they take, will reveal Christ in us, they will demonstrate our strength, which is the power of his resurrection.

This is how we share in his suffering, becoming like him in his death. This is how we know the power of the resurrection. And it is in this that we rejoice as the power of Christ is revealed in our lives.

And so we come to the last verse of our passage, v11, "that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead."

At first glance, it might seem that Paul is here speaking in a way that might make us wonder if he has confidence in his salvation. After all, he says "by any means possible" – doesn't he know that he has already been rescued? Indeed, he does, and he talks about that in many other places, including v9 of our passage today and chapter 1:23 of this same book which you heard Ps Dave discuss a few weeks ago.

Paul IS voicing uncertainty here, but it is not uncertainty over the destination (which is the resurrection from the dead). It is uncertainty over the events that lie between here and there.

Paul doesn't know what the future path will look like. Will it be straightforward and easy? Unlikely, given what we know of Paul's journey so far. Will it be long and winding, filled with many difficulties that can be overcome only with the power of Christ at work in his life? Only time will tell. And so it is with us.

We don't know what the future will hold. For some of you that future will be long indeed, for others it will be much shorter than you could ever anticipate. But whatever the path, 'by any means possible', we know what we will attain.

As the musicians come up to lead us through our closing song, *Jesus Paid it All*, I'd like to finish with a paraphrase of this last verse, taken from Alex Motyer's commentary (p170).

His paraphrase is extremely useful in helping us to grasp Paul's meaning. Here is what he says:

So that by whatever route God in his providence shall ordain – and what it will be I do not know – empowered by the risen Christ and accompanied by Christ himself I will follow him, bearing my cross, descending with him into death, and then for all eternity, still with him, enjoy the glory of the resurrection.

Isn't that a rescue plan worth rejoicing in?

Let's pray.

Discussion Questions: Rejoice in God's Rescue Plan for Wretches

1. How does the Christian story differ from the Muslim story? Why is this important?
2. How does this passage fit into the overall flow of the book of Philippians?
3. What was the take-away for you from this passage?
4. Of what is Paul reminding the Philippians in v1? What makes his reminder 'a safeguard'?
5. According to vv2-6, who were we before Christ rescued us?
6. Why is circumcision such a big deal in Paul's ministry?
7. Paul's 'religious resume' is given in vv4-6 – what would your 'religious resume' look like? In other words, what do we do to try to rescue ourselves?
8. What do vv7-9 teach us about who we are?
9. What is the thing you value most in your life? Is it Christ? If not, how might you go about casting it from you?
10. What is The Great Exchange? How would you explain it to a new Christian or an unbeliever?
11. Why is attaining the 'righteousness that comes from God' both extremely easy and extremely difficult?
12. What do vv10-11 teach us about who we are becoming?
13. What is it about us that the world hates? Consider 2 Corinthians 2:15-16.
14. Have you ever suffered persecution for the sake of Christ?
15. How does 2 Corinthians 4:8-11 help us to rejoice in times of suffering?
16. What does Paul mean in v11, "that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead"?
17. How can this passage help us to become more mature men and women in Christ?