

Keeping the Main Thing the Main Thing

I Will Choose Joy #5

Philippians 3:10-11

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ¹⁰ When the Lord your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you—a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, ¹¹ houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant—then when you eat and are satisfied, ¹² be careful that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

In mid-June of 1776, five men were tasked with the daunting challenge of keeping the main thing the main thing. So, in a musty, dingy, wood framed building with no air conditioning in Philadelphia, PA, armed with just ink, paper and quill, they penned a declaration for His Majesty in Great Brittan that contained these words: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.

Just five years later, and because these 13 colonies demonstrated their willingness to keep the main thing the main thing, Lord Charles Cornwallis surrendered to the American forces at Yorktown, Virginia with these words: at twelve o'clock on this day, October 19, 1781, the left flank of York will ground their arms and return to their encampments. And at 3 o'clock on this day, October 19, 1781, the right flank of Gloucester will ground their arms and return to their encampments.

On this great, patriotic day, July 4, 2021, I want to suggest to you that the surest way to live in the freedom and independence that the joy of the Lord provides is to wake up each morning armed with knowledge that the day might not go as expected. But regardless of the way it goes, your main objective of the day will be to commit yourself with all your heart, soul, and mind to the undisputable biblical fact that on this day the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.

I want you to take your Bible this morning and turn with me to Paul's Common-Sense Pamphlet, His Declaration of Independence, His Constitution, His Bill of Rights and His Emancipation Proclamation. It's two short sentences found in Philippians 2:10-11. But it's significance for our lives stands second in biblical height; just an inch shorter than Jesus' statement to render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and God what is God's. And the main idea of it is this: on this day, the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.

¹⁰I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

1. A First Priority: "I want to know Christ"

Knowing About the Delaware River Crossing vs Being There: (1) In grammar school, I learned from books about George Washington being chased out of New York in early 1776. (2) I learned about him making that decision on Christmas to cross the Delaware River for Trenton, NJ as the British Soldiers settled down for a long winter's nap. (3) But until I went to Landmark, PA during Christmas time to the very spot where he made his decision – witnessing the sights, sounds, and smell of freezing cold, I never had one inkling of how Washington and his troops felt. There's a difference between knowing about and knowing personally.

The Difference Between "Knowing About" and "Knowing" In the Text: (1) Knowledge as intellectual familiarization with facts...I know. (2) Knowing here equals taking the facts from the head and the experience of the heart and then living in the presence and fellowship of Almighty God; minute by minute; hour by hour...just because he lives.

The Difference Between "Knowing About" and "Knowing in the Bible: (1) Big difference between knowing about Moses and the burning bush and experiencing the flame of his holy presence and commission yourself. (2) Big difference between knowing about Job and his pain and experiencing pain yourself while trying to wrestle with the fact that God is good. (3) Big difference between knowing about Elijah saying, "here I stand, I can do no other." (4) Big difference between knowing

about Mary Magdalene and being the woman on the other side of the line in the sand where stones were about to be cast. (5) Big difference between knowing about Peter and sticking your foot in your mouth like Peter. (6) Big difference between knowing about Saul and experiencing the grace of God like Paul. (7) Big difference between acknowledging Jesus and saying you are his follower.

App: No greater joy can be found in this world than knowing Jesus the way the heroes of the Bible did. It's possible. But cannot happen unless you keep the main thing the main thing.

2. A Second Priority: "And the power of His resurrection"

Early Ben Franklin: Here is my Creed. I believe in one God, the Creator of the Universe. That He governs it by His Providence. That he ought to be worshipped.

After Independence Ben Franklin: We have been assured, sir, in the Sacred Writings, that 'except the Lord build the House, they shall labor in vain.' I firmly believe this; and I also believe that without his concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better than the Builders of Babel." (Constitution Convention, June of 1787)

Power of the Resurrection in the Text: (1) The word for power in the language of the New Testament is *dunamos*. It's where we get word "dynamite." (2) And he links it to "resurrection;" or to bring back to life from the dead.

Without the Power of the Resurrection: (1) Peter is dead in his cowardess; (2) James and John are dead in their explosive temper and anger; (3) Matthew is dead in theft; (4) Nathanael is dead in his Dudley Do Right judgmentalism. (5) Paul is dead as a murderer.

But With the Power of Resurrection: (1) Peter is a bulwark never failing even when crucified upside down; (2) James and John move from anger to saying "beloved" more than any other writers; (3) Matthew went from worst to first; (4) Nathanael saws angels ascending and descending on the ladder of heaven; and (5) Paul is the greatest missionary this world has ever seen.

App: To cancel something means to eliminate it and to neutralize it. It's not denying the past. But it goes cancel our past, for there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.

3. A Third Priority: "And participate in His sufferings"

When Johnny Comes Marching Home: When Johnny comes marching home again, Hurrah! Hurrah! We'll give him a hearty welcome then. Hurrah! Hurrah! The men will cheer, and the boys will shout. The ladies they will all turn out. And we'll all feel gay when Johnny comes marching home. The old church bell will peal with joy. Hurrah! Hurrah! To welcome home our darling boy, Hurrah! Hurrah! The village lads and lassies say. With roses they will strew the way. And we'll all feel gay when Johnny comes marching home.

Bumper Sticker Christianity: (1) Too blessed to be stressed; (2) Triumph is "umph" added to the try; (3) With Jesus, don't worry be happy; (4) Know Jesus? No Trouble.

The Problem: If Jesus is a protectant from suffering, someone forgot to tell the writers of the Bible.

The Difference Between Suffering and Participation in Christ's Suffering: (1) Everyone suffers; (2) Only the ones who know the Lord Jesus see a purpose in it and a chance to feel the way Jesus felt. (3) For those who follow Christ, no amount or degree of suffering is in vain. It always serves as purpose.

App: Is it well with you soul when all is not well with life?

4. A Final Goal: "And attain the resurrection of the dead"

The Statue in the New York Harbor: Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, the tempest-tossed, to me. I lift my lamp beside the golden door.

There Is a Resurrection of the Dead in Christ Coming in the Future: When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound, and time shall be no more. And the dead in Christ will rise

There is a Resurrection of the Dead Who Don't Know Christ Coming in the Future: When the Son of Man Comes in all his glory, he will separate the sheep from goats.

Keeping the main thing the main thing is always anchored in hope: Paul didn't know when that day would come. But he was certain of its arrival.

App: Like the Statue of Liberty, Jesus says give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses.....and I'll lift my lamp beside my golden door.