

# Jesus is Better

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Preacher: Ali Sewell

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Thanks very much, John. And if you've got a Bible in front of you, it'd be worth keeping it open as we look through that passage together. In so many areas of life, it's hard to know what's best, isn't it?

The terms choice overload or overchoice have been coined to describe that situation we perhaps often find ourselves in, where we have so many options that actually we're unable to make any decisions.

If you want to experience that firsthand, you can go onto Amazon. I was recently searching for children's swimming goggles, and suddenly you are confronted with hundreds of different options and thousands of different reviews.

And it's actually been found and proven that that can actually stop people making any decisions, making any choices whatsoever. But really what we need, what I would love, is just an expert to tell me what is best.

You know, get these goggles, get that Hoover, get that car, you know, whatever it might be. Someone who knows what they're talking about. Well, unfortunately, in this passage in Philippians, Paul's not going to help us with our shopping decisions, I'm afraid.

[ 1 : 1 2 ] But he is going to help us with something that is much more significant than that. Because in the same way, our world offers us lots of choices in how to live, doesn't it?

Lots of paths to follow. Lots of things we're told are important or vital. Even the things that we're told, this is what you need to be doing.

So what is the right thing to commit to? We're back again to that question, aren't we? What is best? With so many options, that can be a hard question to answer.

And actually for the Philippian church and for us as well, as well as these various different choices that they're being subjected to, there's also opposition that's attached to certain options.

Paul himself and the Philippian church, we've seen as we've been working our way through this letter, we're going through suffering because of their decision to follow Jesus. If too many options can make us perhaps passive and choose nothing at all, well then opposition, once we've made a decision, can easily make us give up on that option and turn back.

[ 2 : 2 2 ] And so Paul writes to fill that need we have of someone, an expert, to give us confidence, telling us clearly what is best, what is the best path.

Someone to give us real certainty in those big questions in life. What are we putting our hope in? What are we spending our life for? What are we striving after? To help us know what is best so we can choose the best thing.

And so even when that choice gets hard, when there is kind of pushback or opposition there, that we can keep on going with confidence. And again, not just confidence, but also joy.

That idea of joy and rejoicing has been a big theme throughout this letter. And that's how Paul begins chapter 3 as well, isn't it? Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.

Paul is going to lay out how Jesus and following him is the best option by far. That Jesus far surpasses anything else that our world has to offer.

[ 3 : 26 ] And so we can choose Jesus, rejoice in Jesus, stick with Jesus, even when things get tough, knowing that ultimately Jesus is best. And Paul is going to show that Jesus is best in two different areas that we'll look at together.

And the first one is this, that trusting in Jesus is better than salvation by works. Trusting in Jesus is better than salvation by works.

What do we mean by salvation by works? That's a kind of a theological term, a technical term in some ways, which basically means any way that we think we can be saved, that we think we can come to have a relationship with God, that's kind of biblically speaking what being saved is.

There's any way that means we think we can do that by our own efforts, by our own works, by what we do. And so in verse 2, Paul starts with this really strong warning, doesn't he?

Look out for the dogs. Look out for the evildoers. Look out for those who mutilate the flesh. Who is Paul kind of sticking it to here? Why does he use such strong language? Well, he's speaking about those.

[ 4 : 32 ] He's speaking about a group of people who were trying to call the Philippians back from trusting in Jesus, back to this salvation by works. Back to instead trusting in their own efforts, or trusting in the kind of external signs of religiosity that they carried out.

One particular example of those signs would be the sign of circumcision for the men. The idea that it was this external sign, which was something that would make you one of God's people.

And so you see then, Paul, contrast what these people were teaching with what the church holds out in verse 3, what the church needs to hold on to. He says, Paul is laying out the two options here.

He says, Either you can trust in, as it says here, the flesh. You can trust in your own works, in our own efforts. Really a tick box kind of religion, which says if you do this, and this, and this, and if that outweighs that, well then you can kind of climb your way up to God.

You can earn that salvation. You do all these things, and God will owe you. That's salvation by works. I think for us as humans, for so many people, that is our default kind of setting.

[ 6 : 00 ] If there is a God out there, then there must surely be a lot of stuff that we need to do to make him pleased with us. That's the basis of a lot of religions. The alternative is, as Paul says, those who put no confidence in the flesh.

Those who do not trust in their own efforts, but instead, Paul says, worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus, i.e. they trust in Jesus alone to rescue them.

Paul says those are the only two options, either our salvation or our hope in being reconciled to God. Either it is down to us, down to the flesh, down to what we do, or it is down to God.

It is down to what he has done through Jesus. And Paul is stressing, as we've said, that trusting in Jesus is better than salvation by works.

It's better than trusting in ourselves. How can Paul say that? Well, he kind of backs up what he's saying there in verses 4 and 5 and 6, where he shows that actually he's not just making this stuff up.

[ 7 : 07 ] He is an expert in the field, as it were. Paul isn't just kind of throwing stones from the outside. No, this salvation by works, this confidence in the flesh, is very much that the world that Paul had been part of, a leading part of.

Have a look at what he says in those verses. He says, Paul is saying, if salvation by works worked, if we really could have that confidence in the flesh, if you really could save yourself, well, I have tried every option.

Not just that, I've excelled at every option. Here is this kind of list of credentials. Here is my salvation by works CV, Paul says, and it is very impressive. Now, unlike some of the things Paul lays out here, what he says, what he writes in those verses, they might seem a little bit distant to us.

We're unlikely to trust in what tribe we're descended from, or some of the more Jewish criteria that Paul lists there, but actually the concept is completely current and completely relevant.

Now, we can get to the heart of it for ourselves when we ask the question, what are the things that I think will gain me favor with God? Is it that I ticked kind of Christian on the latest government census?

[ 8 : 46 ] Is it that I'm here at church more Sundays than I miss? Is it perhaps even that I've been baptized at some point in my life? Or is it that I'm just generally a good person?

I care about others. I'm involved in working for justice. I help with charity stuff. Maybe it's relative to a lot of people. We look out and we see what other people are doing. We look at the world around us and we think, surely I must figure quite highly on a kind of moral league table.

There's nothing scandalous that I do that would make the news. Maybe even I'm quite proactive on social media, posting about Christian causes, defending Christian values, making a stand in these kind of areas.

Whatever it might be that makes us think, surely these things are lifting us up a few rungs on the ladder toward God. Our list will be different from Paul, but the principle is the same.

Whatever things, which absolutely are not wrong things, often might be very good things, very helpful things. But if they start to be what our trust is found in, God must love me because I've done these things.

[ 9 : 54 ] If they start to be the grounds of our salvation, salvation by works, our works, well then it's about these things that Paul writes in verse 7.

But whatever gain I had, this incredible CV that looked so impressive, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. All these things I thought I had going for me, all these things I put my confidence in, are actually nothing compared to Jesus.

Paul says it is Christ alone that I need to trust in him, not these things I did by my own efforts. Salvation, I say trusting in Jesus, is better than salvation by works.

And then Paul goes on to say, well why is that? He gives us the answer to that down in verse 9, where Paul says he wants to be found in him, that is in Christ, 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, he says.

That concept of righteousness that you hear repeated in that verse there is really key here. What does it mean? Well really righteousness means being right with God.

[ 11 : 13 ] It's actually a kind of a legal term. The picture is almost God as the judge looking over us as we stand in the dark and say, not guilty. That's what it means to be righteous.

And one of the huge questions really that life asks and that the Bible answers is, how can God say that about us? When actually we know how flawed we are as people.

How if God is holy and his standard is perfection, which it is, how can people like us, with our sins, some of the things that people might know about us, also some of the things that people might not know, that the dark parts of our life that we try and hide, how can we ever have that verdict of being righteous declared over us?

And Paul says that the answer is we can only find that in Jesus. That righteousness from God that depends on faith, where we trust it in Jesus and not ourselves.

We trust that Jesus on the cross paid the penalty for our sins. And where we don't have confidence in ourselves, in the flesh, as Paul says, it's not that we've kind of done our bit, we've been pretty good, we've kind of climbed up this far and God has come down to meet us in the middle.

[ 12 : 30 ] I know that the message of the gospel of Christianity is that that righteousness, that salvation, that restored relationship with God is only through faith in Jesus, only through what he's done, confessing our sins, our weakness, confessing that we need him and trusting what he has done for us, accepting that righteousness as a gift from God, as it says here.

Trusting in Jesus is better than salvation by works. Why? Because it's only Jesus that can provide us with the righteousness that we so desperately need.

It's not that there are kind of two ways to salvation, two ways to be made right with God, the faith in Jesus way and then the human works and effort way. It's just the Jesus way is a bit better. No, the Jesus way is the only way that works.

God is so big, so perfect, so holy. We are so prone to wandering as we sang earlier, so often weak, so flawed. That we could never climb our way up.

Jesus is better because the alternative simply doesn't work and even if it could, even if we thought it were possible to earn our way to God, all that provides us with is a life of anxiety and worry and exhaustion because how could we actually know if we're ever good enough?

[ 13 : 49 ] How could we know if we've done enough? How could we know what God's judgment about us will be? But through faith in Jesus, we can have that certainty that comes from knowing it is a righteousness from God.

Our righteousness is based on His work and because it's what He has done, we can be confident that if we trust in Him, we will never lose it. And so again, how do we rejoice in the Lord as Paul began in verse 1?

How do we keep going with Him even in the face of opposition? We first need to know and we first need to remember throughout our Christian lives this is something we can never take for granted, something we keep on coming back to, knowing that faith in Jesus is better than salvation by works because Jesus alone offers us the righteousness that comes from God.

So there we go. There's the first area where Paul makes his point that Jesus is better than any alternative, any other way of living, that Jesus is the very best and the one to choose.

Really, that's verses 1 through to 7 and then verse 8, Paul takes that central truth that Jesus is best and he then kind of expands it massively. Let me read again verse 8.

[ 15 : 08 ] Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ 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.

What else does Jesus, sorry, does Paul say that Jesus is better than? He says, I count everything as loss. Paul says, it's not only that trusting in Jesus is better than salvation by works, it's not just in that area of, you know, where do we find our righteousness?

righteousness. It's also that knowing Jesus is better than everything else. And so that's what we see in this second section, really focusing on that verse there, verse 8, that knowing Jesus is better than everything else.

And again, it's good to remember here that when Paul is speaking to us, he is speaking with genuine kind of authority and experience. If Paul was like an Amazon reviewer, he'd have that verified tag just after his name.

You know, Paul, just as he had reason to put confidence in the flesh, that self-salvation, that kind of CV, he lists and rejects. Also, Paul was very much a man who had experienced the finer things in life, we could say.

[ 16 : 29 ] We know from elsewhere that Paul was a Roman citizen. Paul was from a privileged background. Paul was very well educated, he was climbing his career ladder faster than his contemporaries.

So again, this is not someone who didn't have anything saying, well, that's fine, I didn't want it anyway. No, here is Paul, someone who has had it all, saying, actually, I count that as loss, as nothing, as rubbish, in order that I may know Christ, in order that he might, as Paul says, gain Christ.

again, we live in a world constantly telling us what the most important thing is, that actually our career is what defines us, or that it's family or relationships, or that it's our children being happy and successful and having every opportunity, that that should be our priority.

Or even just that they need to have fun, to have experiences, to enjoy yourself. And all of us, I'm sure, in this room, we could add more examples to that. Things that either overtly or just subtly, the world is telling us constantly, this is what's best, this is what's most important, this is what you need to be committing to and striving after.

And all of these examples, all of these things that we could think of, all of these things that we do often look to kind of chase after, they would all fit under this kind of umbrella of everything that Paul speaks about here.

[ 18 : 03 ] Everything he says that the world sees as gain, as value, as meaning, Paul says he's willing to get rid of all of that to know Christ. Because knowing Jesus is better than everything else.

Okay, so here's, I suppose, the challenge for us then. What does it look like for us to count these things as loss? As Paul says, what does it really mean?

I think two important things that we see here in verse 8. First, the start of the verse, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ, Paul says.

That because of there, it can also be translated in light of or compared to. And there is a sense in this verse in which we are not being told that all of these things are wrong, absolutely not.

We are not being told that we have to get rid of everything. We are being told that all of these things, everything, has to take their place under knowing Christ.

[ 19 : 04 ] That he is the priority. That Jesus is the thing of surpassing worth. We sang a new song the last couple of weeks based on that well-known kind of old chorus.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face, and the things of earth will go strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.

That's part of the idea here. And that is completely true that whatever we do it's done in light of Jesus. That he is of surpassing greatness. That whatever we do that Jesus has the priority.

And that's part of what this verse is saying. And yet I do think there's a danger that we hear that and we think, oh well that's great because I can just carry on basically doing everything that I currently do.

I can live my life that looks very similar to the way everyone else around the world is living. And all I really need to do is just say actually no, but Jesus is at the top of that.

[ 20 : 05 ] And actually we do genuinely believe that knowing Jesus is the most important thing but actually if we're not careful that doesn't end up meaning we have to actually change anything.

We can actually remain very comfortable. We can actually not need to lose anything at all. We actually very much end up carrying on in the same way as we are looking very similar to those around us.

Well with that in mind, with that danger in mind, let's have a look at the second part of this verse because here Paul writes, for his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ.

Paul kind of ramps things up a little bit in the second half of this verse. He's saying there that there are things in his life that he's had to get rid of. That it is not simply a change in priorities.

It is actually suffering the loss of these things in order to gain Christ. Now that doesn't mean Paul isn't saying if we give up these things we earn a relationship with God. That's absolutely not that.

[ 21 : 10 ] We've spoken about that. But I think for me this is a real challenge. It does mean we can't just listen to this passage and think we can have and do everything that the world around us does and yet just kind of squeeze God in at the top as a banner over those things.

I think this passage means that there will be things in our world things in our lives which actually get in the way of us knowing Christ. Paul says he had to lose these things in order to gain Christ.

There will be things that get in the way and actually that those things have to go. How do we know that we actually mean it when we say that Jesus is our priority? How do we demonstrate that?

Well it's that when those things start getting in the way of us knowing Jesus when those things start drawing us away when those things start limiting our commitment and love for him that we're willing and in fact we are determined to get rid of them rather than risk losing Christ.

We are determined to suffer the loss of them as Paul writes here. Maybe a couple of specific examples can help these absolutely won't fit everyone here but I think they help us to think what does this look like for us?

[ 22 : 27 ] One guy at a previous church that I was at he very deliberately stopped at a certain level in his firm he was kind of successful at his job but despite encouragements and offers of promotion to go higher he remained where he was because he knew that at that level he was able to focus more time on serving his church and being involved there and that that would be compromised if he carried on climbing that ladder and that's not to say that's for everyone but for him it was that promotion that thing that everyone is telling you to chase after the thing the world is seeking that was the thing that had to go because knowing Christ is better perhaps for us it's more mundane things maybe it is that series on iPlayer and maybe it's that amount of time on social media maybe it's that many sports matches that you like to watch perhaps for me perhaps for you those are the things that have to go so that actually we can create meaningful time whether that's for ourselves as individuals whether that's as couples whether that's as a family to grow closer to Jesus that actually we might need to kick stuff out of the way in order that we can spend time in prayer in the Bible and encouraging one another whether that's within our family or within the church family growing to know

Jesus more and yet being willing to do that because knowing Christ is better and of course I can't kind of stand here and prescribe what these different things are for everyone but I do think it's a telling question for us to think about bearing in mind that knowing Jesus is better than everything else how do I make sure that my priorities really do line up under that but also what things might I what things might we as a family need to suffer the loss of in order to best know Christ if we really do think that that is what is best and again Paul then moves on to kind of answer that question why would we want that why is it that knowing Jesus is better than everything else because let's face it unless we are convinced of that we're not going to bother getting rid of anything are we why is it that Paul is able to say knowing Jesus is better than anything else why should we believe him well we find the answer down in verses 10 and 11 where Paul writes this that I may know him and the power of his resurrection

I may share in his sufferings becoming like him in his death that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead and you get here again that repeated emphasis this time on that term resurrection knowing the power of his resurrection and attaining that resurrection why is it that Jesus is better than everything else because ultimately it's only Jesus that can bring that resurrection it is only through gaining Christ it is only through knowing him being found in him that we can share with him in that resurrection I don't know how kind of resurrection as an incentive I suppose how that hits home for you I don't know if that's something you ever even think about I think the church likes so many things kind of pendulum from one extreme to the other I think in the past so much of the Christian message was focused on that question what will happen to you when you die and it's really good I think to remember that actually the gospel is bigger and better than that that actually it really makes a difference in the here and now it offers hope it offers joy it offers purpose so many of the things that we've seen and spoken about in this letter to the

Philippians but it's important we don't kind of pendulum swing too far in that direction and forget about these questions of eternity because they are fundamental and Paul throughout this letter has had that kind of forward looking focus looking forward to the day of Christ teaching the church what he thinks about his own death and the significance of that focusing here on Jesus and the resurrection and our need of that the question of what happens when we die is a question our world prefers not to ask ultimately because it's a question where the everythings of the world the things that we're told to strive after actually can't hold out any hope they don't have a solution that actually on that final day none of those things it's a sobering thought to think that none of those things we poured so much of our lives into will make a difference except for

Jesus and so knowing Jesus is better than everything else Jesus is worth giving everything for because ultimately he and only he can provide that answer that resurrection is possible only through Jesus and we know it's possible because Jesus has been there Jesus has demonstrated it himself first that he suffered in our place on the cross and three days later he rose again that is what means we can be certain of this promise resurrection not to more of the same but resurrection to a perfect eternity with God resurrection following Jesus to where Jesus is now our culture is so sort of in the moment isn't it rather than future focused even our entertainment now is delivered in kind of 30 second shorts or highlights or reels or whatever it might be and so perhaps previous generations have been able to see more the importance of the big picture than we have and the missionary

[ 28 : 24 ] Jim Elliot has a famous quote that summed this up so well I'm sure we've mentioned this before but it bears repeating he famously said he is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep in order to gain what he cannot lose and Jim Elliot actually did lose his life taking the gospel to new tribes who didn't at that time know Jesus and doesn't that fit with what Paul is saying here about his knowing Jesus and really what we should expect in knowing Jesus that I may know him and the power of his resurrection I may share his sufferings becoming like him in his death that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead knowing Jesus having faith in him being in Christ as Paul often say that often requires suffering and putting up with pressure from the outside that involves being distinct from the world we live in it often requires as we've been saying the suffering of loss of putting aside of counting as rubbish so much of what the world says is important it often includes as we've seen in previous weeks sacrificially serving thinking of others as more significant than ourselves and yet Paul says the key to rejoicing the key to keeping on going is to share in that suffering with Christ because knowing

Jesus is better than everything else trusting Jesus is better than salvation in works because it's only Jesus that can give us that righteousness that right standing with a holy God that all of us need and knowing Jesus is better than everything else because it's only in Jesus that we can have that promised resurrection and that we can have an eternal hope Jesus is what's best and it's having confidence in that that helps us live for him in every area of life to have him as our priority and to keep on going even when that's hard and so without all that in mind let's pray together that God would help us grasp that more and more just the incredibleness of Jesus as Paul has been laying out for us in this passage let's pray together