

Gospel clarity

sermon discussion guide

based on **Philippians 3.1-11**

which can be accessed at www.stjamesbythepark.org/current-sermon-series

This is part of our series looking at Philippians ("church: family on mission")

Intro: What sort of Christian 'pedigree' do you have?

Read Philippians 3.1-11

Paul is writing to a church which obviously has some dodgy preachers who are looking to take advantage of Paul being in prison (1.15-17). It seems they are advocating circumcision (even for Gentile Christians) as a way to have confidence before God (3.2). Yes, that old chestnut, which affected so many of the first churches!

What does Paul mean by 'It is we who are the circumcision'? See also Romans 2.28-29; Galatians 5.6. (Interestingly, the idea of having 'circumcised hearts' isn't a New Testament idea – even in the Old Testament, God was really after his people's hearts – see Deuteronomy 10.16; 30.6.)

Paul then lists the reasons he could give for his confidence before God (v4-6). In Old Testament terms, he had impeccable Jewish credentials.

What are some of the ways we can slip into thinking about 'performance based religion'?

Paul then rubbishes his Jewish credentials in comparison to what he gained through Christ (v7-10).

What were some of the things Paul had lost as a Christian over the years?

What are some of the things we can lose when we become Christians and grow in discipleship?

Paul talks about the 'surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord?' Is that something you can echo at the moment? Why / why not?

Paul doesn't want to shy away from suffering for Christ, because he knows it will lead to resurrection (v10-11). Hence his comment that 'for to me, to live is Christ; to die is gain' (1.21). What can make us shy away from suffering for Christ? What would help us adopt Paul's attitude more?

How does this passage speak to our desire to be a God-dependent, grace-filled, Bible-based, mission-focused, authentic community?

Up (love God): Spend some time praising God for the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ. You might also want to listen to / join in the song "All I once held dear"

In (love each other): How can you help each other remember that knowing Jesus is a 'surpassing greatness' compared to anything else in life?

Out (reach the world): Spend some time praying for the suffering church. And consider: A friend who isn't a Christian says to you, "I don't need to be a Christian to be good." How do you respond?