

Knowing Christ – His Death 3

Will you please turn again to Philippians 3. Philippians 3:10, 11. “To know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if any way I arrive at the resurrection from among the dead.”

May we have some prayer. *Dear heavenly Father, as we gather here this morning, we want to thank Thee for being so gracious to us. Thou has led us through the last few days and Thou has brought us to this hour. It is all Thy mercy and grace for which we are most thankful. We do praise and thank Thee that Thou thus gathers us again this morning. We know that Thy heart's desire is to reveal Thy son to us. We pray that Thou will remove any veil that may be upon our hearts, that the light of Thy continence may shine upon us, that we may see the glory of the Lord today. Dear Lord Jesus, our desire, our longing, is to know You. We want to know the power of Your resurrection. We are willing to have fellowship with Your sufferings. And Lord, we do want to be conformed to Thy death, knowing that there is a glorious resurrection waiting for us. Dear Lord, we pray that Thou will not allow us to draw back. We pray that Thou will enable us to press on towards the goal until that day when we shall see Thee face to face. And there, we will worship and serve Thee forever. Hear our cry. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.*

Thank God for gathering us together again this morning. I think by this time, we will know this key verse by heart. This is the passion of the apostle Paul. How he longed to know Christ. On the road to Damascus, he was met by Christ. And this Christ captured his heart. The more he knew Him, the more he wanted to know Him. So he cried out, “O that I may know Him.” Brothers and sisters, we thank the Lord that we do know Him. But this knowledge of Him should increase within our hearts a desire to know Him more. May this passion fill each one of us. If we really have this hunger and thirst after Him, we know that this is exactly what God wants to do toward us because it is the good pleasure of the Father to reveal His Son in us. So whenever He should find anyone whose heart is one with Him—his heart desire is to know Christ—how it pleases the Father's heart, and how He will reveal His Son in us. So brothers and sisters, as Paul longs to know Christ, we find this is because of how much he did know Christ. And we firmly believe that this will be the same with us because our God is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

In the morning, we share together especially on knowing Christ in His death. We know that the death of Christ is a mystery. How can Christ, who abides forever, die? How can the originator of life die? How can God, the Son of God, ever die? This is a great mystery in the universe. As a matter of fact, even before the foundation of the world, God has already decided that His Son should be the Lamb. And from the foundation of the world, He is the Lamb slain because God knows everything. Out of His love, He created the universe. Out of His love, He created man. He gave the whole creation to His Son. Especially to man, He gave His Son as His greatest gift. And yet He knows beforehand that this man whom He created will rebel against Him. This man that He loves so much will fall into sin and the wages of sin is death. So how could God solve this dilemma? On the one hand, He is the just God. He must do justly. The soul that sins must die. And yet on the other hand, God is love and He does not want anyone to perish. He wants everyone to be a precious gift to His beloved Son. How can God solve this problem? In order to do that, He sent His beloved Son into this world. God cannot die. Therefore, God must come to be a man. The man who knows no sin can die for us sinners that we might be the righteousness of God. So we know that our Lord Jesus' very purpose of coming into this world is to die. He died that we may live. What love is behind this. Brothers and sisters, whenever we think of the death of our Lord Jesus, whenever we survey the cross, our hearts melt, that He should love us so much who are such great sinners.

Brothers and sisters, His death is a great mystery. His death is an all compassing death. His death solves all the problems in the world. His death is different from all other deaths because His death is an atoning death. By His death, not only are we human beings restored, reconciled to God, but even the whole creation will be reconciled to the fullness of God. His death is to be remembered. And that's the reason why we remember the Lord at His table. It is not a ritual, a formality. He knows our frame. In spite of the great love that He has bestowed upon us, He knows how ungrateful we are, how forgetful we are. And because He loves us so deeply, He does not want us to forget Him. He wants us to remember Him. So He commands us to remember Him at the table, to remember how He shed His blood for the remission of our sins, how He has His body broken that we might be made whole, that we may be reconciled to God our Father. It is a command, a command of love. He wants us to remember His death because His death means so much to us. Two thousand years ago, He was crucified on the cross. This is a fact. Two thousand years ago, there on the cross, He accomplished the work of redemption. Two thousand years ago, His death solved all our problems. Therefore

before He passed away, He shouted, "It is finished." The work of redemption is finished. You cannot add anything to it and you should not take anything away from it. His death is a fact. The value of His death is eternal. It never changes because of time or space. It never changes because of you or me. His cross is a fact. Him crucified is a fact. And that fact of His crucifixion is eternal. The value never changes. This is the eternal truth. Brothers and sisters, the cross is eternal. Those who lived before the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus look forward to the cross and they live. We who live after crucifixion, we look back to the cross. And as we look, we live because His death has eternal value. This is the foundation of our faith. This is the foundation upon which we stand, we are saved, and we are built up. We say this is the truth, the objective truth. What do you mean by objective truth? It means that it is something that is done outside of you and me. It is not something that we've done; it is something that God has done in Christ for us and it is finished. This is the ground on which we stand. But brothers and sisters, just to know the objective truth is not enough. Just to believe that two thousand years ago Christ died on the cross is not enough. It is enough for God, but so far as we are concerned, it is not enough because this objective truth, which is true, who never changes, and yet this truth has to become our subjective experience. This death of our Lord Jesus that happened two thousand years ago has to become real in us today. His death is our death. And unless this happens, then you'll find He may have done everything for us and we still have nothing. So brothers and sisters, it is very very important, important for us, that we, in this way apprehend, appropriate that objective truth of the death of Christ into our subjective experience in life. There is a hymn I like very much. It is called the Cross of Christ. I will just read to you the first verse. *Though Christ a thousand times in Bethlehem be born, if He is not born in thee, thy soul is still forlorn. The cross in Golgotha will not save thy soul, the cross in thine own heart only can make thee whole. O cross of Christ I take thee into this heart of mine, to help me die to my own self and rise to thy life divine.* Brothers and sisters, here in this hymn, it says Christ can be born in Bethlehem to a thousand times. But if He's not born in you, you still don't have anything. The cross in Golgotha cannot save you. It is the cross that is in you that saves you. So the refrain is *O cross of Christ, I take You into my heart to deliver me, to help me to die to my own self that I might rise up to live in life divine.* Brothers and sisters, unless the death of Christ becomes a reality in us, unless His cross is not only planted in Golgotha but is planted in our hearts, and great things have been done, we receive nothing. Brothers and sisters, in so far as we are concerned, it is most important (I cannot emphasize this more), it is extremely essential that we do not look at the death of our Lord Jesus as a death in past history. You know one thing, in the book of Koran, with

Islam, they can recognize Jesus as the Son of God. But never once in the Koran is the death of Christ mentioned. Brothers and sisters, the death of our Lord Jesus is a principle element of the gospel of Jesus Christ. But just by acknowledging the fact of His death, even understanding the value of His death, if we do not receive His death into us, that His death be our death, nothing is being done. Now who longs for death? We long for life. But only when our eyes are opened and see the value of His death, do we long that His death be our death. So the apostle Paul here says, "O that I may be conformed to His death." You know in the Chinese Bible, we use another translation. We translate it as "imitate," when you think of imitate and you think it is something done outwardly. Just like the children, they know how to imitate. So we older people need to be very careful because they have this instinct to imitate. Imitation is not real. Outwardly they can imitate exactly alike. But inwardly, it is all different. They are still children. They haven't grown up yet. But they can talk like grown ups. They can act like grown ups. But you know, when such things happen, it is laughable. The Bible uses the word "conform." Now even though this word is translated in English, sometimes it is "imitate," some versions use "conform." But "conform" gives you the idea of something it is happening within. Here is a form and you are to be conformed to that form. Here is a mold. It is already there. It is a perfect mold. How are you going to multiply? You pour into that mold. And when it comes out, it is exactly the same. So you find "conform" is something inward. It is not just taking something upon you. It is something that you enter in and it comes out the same. In other words, to be conformed to His death is be like His death. What His death means is what our death means. All the values of His death is ours. It is something that happens within us. And that's the reason why you find Romans 8. God's eternal purpose is that we may be conformed to the image of His beloved Son. We are to be conformed to the image of His Son's death that we may be conformed to the image of His Son's life, that we may take up all the inner character of our Lord Jesus, that we may be like Him. This is the will of God. But you find that we have to be conformed to His death, let His death put to death everything that is not of His Son. His death put everything that is dead to death. Things that need to die, everything that is not of God that cannot return to God, it has to be put into death. And this is what the death of our Lord Jesus has done for us.

So brothers and sisters, this morning we would like to share together how to be conformed to His death. His death is an eternal reality. But how much of His death is real in our lives? How far have we been conformed to His death? And this is something that we need to be before the Lord.

Before we do this, I think we would like to relate a few principles. With these few principles, we will be able to be conformed to His death. First of all, in every spiritual thing, we need revelation because spiritual things are way beyond us. The natural man does not understand the things of God. They think that it is folly. Brothers and sisters, in so far as we ourselves are concerned, we can never understand anything spiritual. You may be the wisest person in the world. You may be able to understand everything under the sun, but when you come to spiritual things, there is a block. So you find in all spiritual things, we need revelation. We need God to reveal to us. It is very humbling but this is where we are. This is real. Do not think that by your own cleverness you can enter into spiritual reality. So first of all, we need revelation. We need God to reveal the death of Christ to us. Otherwise, we will not appreciate His death. What has His death to do with me? I don't want to die. I want to live. Brothers and sisters, one day God opens your eyes, you will begin to see how precious, valuable is His death. This is the only way to our salvation. This is the only way that would lead us back to the fullness of God. And when you've received such revelation, then you will begin to appreciate His death. The more He reveals the value of the death of Christ to you, the more you'll long to know His death. So I believe first of all in order to be conformed to His death, you need a revelation of the value of His death.

Then secondly, everything that is from God is grace. God is the God of grace. He gives us everything. He prepares everything and then He gives it to us. So you find that it is grace. Grace is given freely to all. Grace does not choose whom to give. Grace gives freely. It never charges anything. But because it is grace, the only way to receive grace is by faith. If you want to receive grace through any other means, you won't get it. The more you try, the more you reject grace. So you find that to be conformed to His death requires faith. Now what is faith? I like the translation of Darby because I feel that it really show you the picture. Now what is faith? In Hebrews 11:1 "Faith is the substantiating of the things hoped for, the conviction of the things unseen." I think this is the (I won't say definition, but) explanation of what faith is. There is something there. But how can you make that something to be your own experience? You need faith. Here is a podium. It is here. Before we came to this conference, before we entered into this hall, this podium was already here. It is a fact, an accomplished fact. Then you enter in through the door and immediately, you see this podium. And by seeing this, actually, you receive it into yourself. It becomes an experience to you. This podium is not only outside of you because you see it, you substantiate it into your being. Here is a

substance. It's there. Whether you're here or not, it is already here. But when you come in, because you have eyes to see, your eyes substantiate this substance to be your experience. But suppose a blind person enter this room. He can not see this podium. And when people tell him there is a podium there, he says, "No, there is none because I can't see it." Now, his not seeing it does not eliminate this podium. But, because he can not see it, he cannot enjoy it. He and this podium are apart. It is by seeing that make these things into one. And that is what faith is. Christ died two thousand years ago. It is a fact. The value of the death is eternal. It always there; it never changes. But when you come to the cross of Christ and when you lift up the eyes of faith, then you find the value of His death comes into your being and you are saved. So brothers and sisters, in order to be conformed to His death, we need faith. We need to believe what God has already done in Christ Jesus. We need to look away from everything. We need to look away from our feeling. We need to look away from our own reasoning and by faith, look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. And that's the way you receive His death. By faith you believe His death is your death.

And then thirdly, in order to be conformed, you have to be first deformed. You know we have an old form. And we have that old Adamic form. And we have had that for a long time. And in order to be conformed to the death of Christ, you have to be deformed, to be melted first. So therefore, there should be a breaking down in order that we may be poured into the mold. And that's the reason why there's certain suffering involved. You know the apostle Paul in Philippians 3:10, he said, "To know Him." How do I know Him? In what substantial way can I know Him? He said to know the power of His resurrection. Our brother has already shared with us that our Lord Jesus is the resurrection and the life. And there is such power in that resurrection life because resurrection is life out of death. Resurrection is life entering into death, robbing death of its power and coming out of death. Now that is resurrection. There is no power greater than the power of resurrection. So in order to know Him, we need to know the power of His resurrection. We know His life in us, and His life is so dynamic. This life within us is able to do anything. We need to know Christ in His resurrection. I sometimes wonder why Paul puts it this way. If it's left to me, probably, my theology will be to know Him and to know His death that I may know the power of His resurrection. But Paul does not say that. He said, "to know the power of His resurrection "before" to be conformed to His death." Why? Without knowing the power of His resurrection, we dare not be conformed to His death because death involves suffering. We have to share with the sufferings of Christ. Of course we cannot share with His suffering of atoning death

because on the cross, He died for us and our sins. There He tread the wine press alone. We have no part in it. All we need is to receive what He has done for us. But there is another part of His suffering. When He was a man on earth, even though He was sinless, perfect, He was tempted in all things. Without sin, as a man, His will is perfect. But He has to lay down His own will. "Not My will but Thy will be done." He said, "My time does not belong to Me. Your time is always ready. You can do anything you want to. But I cannot. I'm a bond slave to God." There's suffering there. He suffered because He's different. He suffered because He does not belong to this world. He suffered for righteousness sake. He suffered for love sake. And this is the part of His suffering into which God call us for fellowship. By fellowshiping with His suffering, we are being conformed to His death. So without knowing the power of His resurrection, we dare not and cannot be conformed to His death. There is a certain amount of the power of His resurrection we have to know first. Then we can have fellowship with His sufferings and being conformed to His death. So brothers and sisters, let us now be ready to apply these principles.

So far as our being saved is concerned, I think we do not need to go over it in details because before we believed in the Lord Jesus, we were all proud of ourselves. We thought that we were righteous, that we could go to God on our own merits. If I do not go to heaven, heaven will be empty. Brothers and sisters, you may not say it but you mean it. This why you feel you do not need the Savior. So what the Holy Spirit did-He had to break us down first. When the Holy Spirit shall come, He will demonstrate to the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgement. Of sin because they do not believe in Christ Jesus. Of righteousness because He, our Lord, has gone to the Father. Of judgement because the God of this world is just. Brothers and sisters, first the Holy Spirit has to break us down. He will touch our consciences to create within us guilty consciences for sin because we do not believe in Christ Jesus. The greatest sin in the world is to reject Christ Jesus because Christ Jesus is the love of God that extends to mankind. The greatest sin is rejecting the love of God. Of righteousness because our Lord has returned to the Father. He is the only One who has the right to be in the presence of God. This is righteousness. Do we have such righteousness? You may have righteousness to stand before man, but to stand before God requires a righteousness that nobody has, otherwise you will be smitten to death. Oh our Lord Jesus has that righteousness. He is the righteous One who is by the side of God the Father. He is the standard of righteousness. We don't have that. Of judgement because even the whole world will be judged and all that are in the world will be judged. And you are no

exception. Brothers and sisters, then we begin to realize our righteousness as filthy rags that cannot cover our nakedness before God. Only then will we cry out, "How can I be saved?" And then it pleases God to reveal His Son to you. Look and live. By faith you receive the grace of God and you are saved. And you find that His death has taken away your sins. Brothers and sisters, so when you believe in the Lord Jesus, you take the first step to be conformed to His death. You receive His death as burying your sins on His body.

Now we said yesterday that the cross stands between the world and you. The cross separates us from the world. We are in the world but we are not of the world because God has already called us out of the world. Today we are strangers, sojourners on this earth. We are aliens in a foreign land. We are traveling, journeying towards our own country. That is what we are. But brothers and sisters, after we are saved, do we still love the world? We are not even conscious of what the world as a system under Satan really is. We have no desire to be saved from this evil age. The Bible says, "Do not be conformed to this world." The world is also a mold. It is a system, a form. It gathers up everything in this world into a giant system and it is under the rule of Satan, the adversary of God. We are in the world but thank God He has delivered us. We are not of the world. We are a heavenly people upon this earth. We are different. We are separated. We are a holy nation. Brothers and sisters, but do we realize that? Do we realize that the world crucified our Lord? How can we befriend this world? How can we even expect the world to love us? How can we follow the trend, the current of the world? Do not be conformed to the world. Do not squeeze yourself. You are too big. You are too dignified. You are a child of God. You try to squeeze yourself into this mold, the fashion of this world. Oh do not be conformed to this world. But be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what is good and acceptable and the perfect will of God. I want to say a word to the young people. We older people sometimes try to tell the younger ones, "Do not love the world because if you love the world, the love of the Father is not in you. Do not love the world and the things of the world, the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, the pride of life." Oftentimes our young people will say, "You have already tasted the world. So it is easy for you to say. But to us, the world is a new continent. We want to explore and we want to know exactly what it is until we suffer enough. Then, we will not be conformed to this world." Do tell a young person in the Lord, "Do not have a vision of what the world really is; if a young person does not have a vision of what the world really is, you know the god of this world has blinded our eyes." He makes us see the world as a mirage. You see water, you rush to it. But it is not water.

It is salt. It cannot quench your thirst. Therefore in the early days, many when they go to the west, they die. It's a mirage but you don't see it. You love it. What can you do? Prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God." We tell young people, "Love the will of God. Prove it in your life." You ask the young people, "What is the will of God?" And the reply is, "Anything that is against me is the will of God." No wonder they don't love the will of God. How can you force them to love the will of God? Impossible. Brothers and sisters, how can you be conformed to the death of Christ? In relation to the world, that's where consecration is so important. The first thing after a person is saved, when he is still in the first love, that's the time to present your bodies a living sacrifice. Lord, this is redeemed by You. I have no right to live for myself. Willingly, voluntarily, gladly, I give myself to You. I give up all my rights. I hand myself over to You. Now You are my Lord. You can use my body, my all in whatever You want. Brothers and sisters, have you so given yourself to the One who loves You so much? Do you keep back anything from Him? If you do this, the Holy Spirit will transform, will renew your mind. Your mind formerly was set towards the world. Now, you find your mind is renewed to set upon God. When this happens, it is easy not to be conformed to the world. It is easy to prove the acceptable, good, and perfect will of God. Look at Paul in Philippians 3. He said, "What I boast of before, what I sought before, what I was proud of before, now I consider this as dross. It's a lost to me because these keep me away from Christ. Now I turn my mind to know Christ for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ. What can be compared with this?" O brothers and sisters, young people, it breaks my heart to see young people who are redeemed by the Lord and yet captured by the world. May God have mercy on us. We can apply this to every aspect of the death of our Lord Jesus. How many of God's people are contented to live in the outer court? As long as I'm saved, even if only my two feet will be just behind the door of heaven, I am happy. But is God happy? How many of God's people are contented by serving in the holy place, work—Christian work, work for God? This is their life. Is that all? Is God satisfied? Does God need you to serve Him? Does He lack anything? How many of God's people really desire to live behind the veil to commune with Him, to gaze upon His face, to worship Him at His feet, to listen to His voice that they may go out and bring the glad tidings to the world? The veil is ripped. Christ has died. The way to the holies is opened. Why remain outside? Brothers and sisters, we are here to satisfy God's heart. If God's heart is not satisfied, no matter how satisfied we are, is it not enough. Brothers and sisters, how far have we been conformed to His death? It is true, it takes time. You do not become spiritual at a second. We need to press on, press on towards the goal and being conformed to His death that we may

arrive at the resurrection among the dead. One day when the Lord shall come back, we shall be resurrected and we shall reign with Him. There we shall see His face daily and there we serve Him forever. Let's pray.

Dear Heavenly Father, we thank Thee because it is Thy good pleasure to reveal Thy Son in us. Oh Lord, reveal Thy Son in us that we may know Him and the power of His resurrection that we may have fellowship with His sufferings being conformed to His death that we may partake in that resurrection from among the dead. And it is all for Thy sake. Bless Thy people, O Lord. Rescue us from everything that is outside of You. Bring us into the fullness that is in Christ. We ask in Thy precious name, Amen.