

THE BON AIR PULPIT

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Scripture: *Philippians 3:7-8*

Sermon: *I Would Become a Christian--
If It Were Not Too Much To Give Up*

In the third chapter of Philippians, Paul gives his spiritual resume. We understand that he had made it all the way to the top, and then he began to compare what he had before he came to Christ and what he had afterwards. This is what he said:

Whatever was to my profit, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing

greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have lost all

things. I consider everything to be rubbish compared to that which I

had before I gained Christ. I want to be found in Him, not having a

righteousness that comes from my own by living according to the law,

but that which is through faith in Christ Jesus.

I asked a young man if he was interested in becoming a Christian. He said yes, but not now. And I said why not now? He said well, I want to have some fun. Maybe when I get old and can't do anything else I might be interested in becoming a Christian. Then he said I would become a Christian if it were not too much to give up. I said to him, "I did not know you were a theologian." He looked at me and asked, "What's a theologian?" I said that "theo" is a word for God, and "logos" is a word for knowledge. A theologian is a person who has a knowledge of God, and that he had just expressed a lot of knowledge about God. I said, "For example, you have just said to me that you believe that God is a cosmic kill joy. You believe that God is the kind of God who likes to go around taking the fizz out of your carbonated drink and, if you worship Him, life

is going to be dull, uninteresting and boring. The reason you don't want to come to Him is because, really, life can be found apart from Him."

I am sure that young man thought that what he said was original. But I said to him that he needed to understand that what he had just quoted is a passage of scripture in the Bible; in fact, it is the first book of the Bible, which means that it is at least 5,000 years old. I said, "Let me tell you a story: God created a man and a woman, and he put them in a paradise. He said to them about that place that He had provided everything they needed and everything they could want. Time and time again He said, 'This is good, this is good, this is good.' But a new character entered into the story. The character was in the form of a snake who came to Adam and Eve and said, 'Say, has God given you everything you need?' The woman said, 'Yes, everything. Except, he won't let us touch that tree.'"

Now, we must understand, here, that they are speaking *symbolically*, because the Bible says, that tree was the tree of good and evil. What God said to them is that you cannot really receive all that I want to give to you if you experiment with good and evil. I remind you that it is symbolic. It wasn't an apple tree. Somebody has said, "It wasn't the apple on the tree; it was the pair on the ground" that got them in trouble.

But the snake turned to Adam and Eve and said, "Ha, I know why God doesn't want you to eat from that tree. God is keeping the good stuff for himself. He is *withholding* from you. If you will reach out and help yourself, then you will have everything you need."

The amazing thing is the devil doesn't try any new tricks. The old one works very well, thank you. For 5,000 years we have believed the same story, the story is that God is withholding from us something better, that we have to go beyond what He has provided for us, and reach out and get something for ourselves. If we do, then that will satisfy our desire for happiness and joy and fun in our lives.

Let me tell you what Jesus said about the other character in the story, the devil in the form of a snake. Jesus said about him that he was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth. For there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language for he is a liar and the father of all of lies. Now what all of us, individually, have to decide is this: Who are we going to believe? Are we going to believe in a God who is willing to provide for us everything we need, or are

we going to believe the lie of the world and the lie of the evil one who says that God is withholding "the good stuff."? That you have to take things into your own hands to believe it. Let me tell you that everywhere you go, you will find that most people believe this same lie.

I came to Christ when I was a sophomore in college. I came home for the Christmas holidays to get with my old gang, to do the old things. But, all of a sudden, I realized I couldn't do them anymore. It wasn't that I *couldn't* do those things; I just didn't want to do them. So when somebody made a suggestion, I said that I couldn't do that. They looked at me and said, "Why?" I said that, several months before, I had become a Christian. The response was, "Oh! I'm sorry."

You need to be aware that, in the world in which we live, people look at your Christian commitment and say, "I'm sorry." They really feel that you are being deprived and that you live a diminished life because you have given your life to Jesus Christ. Sometimes, of course, we Christians give that impression. Someone has said that most Christians look like owls sitting on a tombstone. And one man told a fellow church member that, with his lips drawn down so low, he looked as though he could eat oatmeal out of a gas tank! Sometimes we almost leave the impression that life for us is very bad, very miserable. And we are just holding on because, one day--if we just suffer enough--we are going to make it to heaven! Let me remind you that Jesus *does* offer us "Pie in the sky, by and by." And, if that were all we were going to get, I'd probably take it, because I like dessert a lot.

But I want to tell you that Jesus Christ offers more. For starters, He came to give you meat and potatoes right now. Listen to what Christ said: "Blessed are the poor in spirit." The word *blessed* simply means: May all the blessings of heaven flow into your life. Jesus said, "I have come that you might have life, and that you might have it more abundantly." Not life as mere *existence*, but life as both a thrill and a joy. *I have come to bring you Life.* The person who gives his heart and his life to Jesus Christ is a person who is going to enter into one of the most exciting, joyful, happy adventures of life. "I have come that you might have Life." Paul said, whenever he compared what he had before Christ and what he had after Christ, it was like comparing garbage to a fine meal!

Let me give you some reasons to consider Christ and His answer for your life, reasons for coming

to Him and saying that you are going to order your life after His way. The first reason is that, if you don't, you will discover that your life is going to be very, very shallow. What you are going to find is that whatever else is out there doesn't meet the needs of who you really are. You see, the Bible says that when God made you, he made you with a body, but you are far more than bundles of flesh and nerves that need to be excited. The Bible says he made you with a mind and emotions; that is, you are an emotional being. The reason most people get sick is not because of their bodies but because of their emotions.

The Bible also says that you have a spirit that can commune with God, who is, Himself, spirit. If all you want to do is to have fun (and by *fun* I mean doing something that pleases the body), you do nothing for your mind and nothing for your spirit. After a while you begin to understand that you have a very shallow existence, and you begin to cry out for something more. You begin to say, surely there has got to be more to life than things that appeal to the body.

I received a call at three o'clock in the morning. On the other end, a man said, "We need you right away.". Shortly afterward, I appeared at his house, a very large house, and went inside where everything was beautifully appointed, and followed the man back to a bedroom where I discovered that his young wife had tried to take her own life by slashing her wrists. I sat down beside her bed. I said to her, "In just a moment I am going to call the doctor and, after that, I am going to call the police, but now I want to ask you a question. Your husband called me first. Why?"

She turned to me and said, "Have you ever chewed a piece of gum? You know how, when you get all the sweet out of it, you just want to spit it out? Well, I want to spit my life out."

Twenty-nine! She had everything on the outside, nothing on the inside. She began to understand what everybody begins to understand sooner or later, and that is that you can have everything and, at the same time, *nothing*. And you begin to think--life has got to be more than this!

Have you ever noticed that hilarity is always associated with young people. It is always

the eighteen-year-old, the twenty-two-year-old friends on television. They are having so much fun! But what the ads, the television shows, the movies don't show you is what happens twenty years later. They don't want you to think about that!

The poet, Edna St. Vincent Millay, was the Marilyn Monroe of her day--the early nineteen hundreds. She had a little saying that went like this: "My candle burns at both ends but, my, when it burns, it gives such lovely light." Well, she was on the cover of magazines. She was on the radio. She was everywhere. All the photographers took her picture. She was the fun girl of her day. Oh, but let me tell you what happened twenty years later. She was in an insane asylum, babbling like an old person, saying, "Pease, please let me take my own life."

Oh, they "forgot" to tell you. They forgot to tell you that if you enter into this kind of existence that you are going to live a life that is very shallow and very, very unfortunate. When you do these sorts of things, is it fun? Of course it is! The devil never goes fishing with an empty hook. Sure it's fun. But what you find is this: Ultimately, it does not bring happiness.

The second thing you will notice about this search for fun is that it is very dangerous. Very dangerous. When I talked to the young man who wanted to have fun before giving his life to Jesus, I said, "Tell me what you think fun is." What he said then is what people still say to me: Fun is either getting "blasted" by something or illicit sex. You just sleep around. So when you see a poll on television, as I did this week, that says, one-third of the college students in America like to get "blasted." That's really having fun.

What I would like for you to do is become a member of my extended family. When a certain family member comes up to you, he is not going to shake your hand in the normal way, and when he walks away, you are going to notice that he walks with a little limp. That's because he was coming home one time about two o'clock one morning, about half drunk, and he ran off the side of the road. He hit a culvert, and for the rest of his life he will never be able to use one hand and he will always walk with a limp.

Or maybe you would like to come and

stand with me in a church like this, and there, in front of us, is a casket holding a sixteen-year-old girl who was out with a boyfriend who wanted to show her lots of fun. She doesn't get another chance, because somebody's definition of fun never asks about the consequences. Her parents will not visit her at college. They will always go to the cemetery instead.

We're told that fun is high speed. And what about sleeping around? Let me tell you what happens with that. Sleeping around means that people become *things* instead of people. So, it's one more notch on your gun, one more proof of his masculinity, of her sexuality. And, unfortunately, girls, you still believe that if a boy looks you in the eye and says, "I love you so much I can't wait to have you," it must be true, and you don't know he's going to go back home and laugh because you have fallen for that same old lie.

You don't understand that one day you'll wake up and realize that you've been used. Because you are nothing more than a *thing*.

The great sickness in America is the *thingification* of people. So you discover that you are expecting, and you say, "Oh, my!" And the *thingification* kicks in, and what you have in your body becomes a *thing*. Throw it away! Do you wonder why so many people come and stand at a wedding altar, only to end up in divorce? One out of every two marriages in America—ten times the world's average--ends up in divorce. You know why? *Thingification!* You are just a thing, not a person I make a commitment to, not a person I want to live my life with. You exist for me. If you don't do what I say and what I want, then I have no use for you anymore.

Maybe it would be good if you talked to some of the one-out-of-every-seventeen adults in America who drink and can't stop. Maybe you would like to hear some of the stories I hear, about how people woke up one day and realized alcohol had made them nothing more than a *thing*.

The third thing Jesus said is that, if you go through life not living according to what He said is real life, you end up unwise. Now you know I am dumb about lots of things. I am amazed at how dumb I am sometimes. But I tell you what I don't want to be dumb about. I don't want to be dumb about life, so dumb that when I get to the end, I'll have to say, "You know, I never understood that thing called life."

Listen to Jesus. *Everyone who hears these*

words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on a rock. The rains came down, the streams rose, the wind blew and beat against that house. Yet it did not fall because its foundation was on a rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.

The question that you have to ask yourself when you determine how you are going to live your life is this: Is it going to meet all of the experiences of your life? Are you preparing yourself for whatever comes? When your kids were small, you may have read to them the little story about the rabbit and the squirrel. The rabbit only wanted to run and play, but the squirrel said, "I think I'd better put away some acorns for the winter." The rabbit said, "Oh, come on, let's have fun!" Then one day, the cold weather came. The little rabbit said, "I don't have anything to eat!!" The squirrel said, "Didn't you know that winter was coming?"

Do you understand that winter comes in every life? What are you prepared for? When the emergency comes, when the difficulties set in, when the problems mount, what do you do?

Do you go out and get another bottle? Do you go out and get another woman? What I mean is, where do you turn?

Young people here know the name Kirk Corbin, the rock idol of millions who, at twenty-seven, took a shotgun and ended his life. But do you know what his mother said in the paper about him? *He was stupid about life.* Stupid about life! Jesus said if you build, and you don't build your life on what He says, you are unwise.

A man came to our Minister of Music one day in a church where I pastored. He said that he would like to sing a solo. We had never heard him sing. Our Minister of Music, therefore, was a little nervous. But he finally said, yes, let's go ahead and let you sing. The man got up and sang a chorus that was written by Bill Gaither: "The longer I serve Him, the sweeter it grows. The more that I love Him, the more love He bestows. Each day is like heaven, my heart overflows. The longer I serve Him, the sweeter it grows."

Then he turned and said, "I can't sing very well, but I really wanted to use that as a word of testimony because, you see, I have been to the doctor this past week. He

says I have three months to live. I wanted to say to you that it has been the greatest joy of my life to serve Jesus." He had found Jesus' way to be the right way.

The question you are going to have to ask in your life is, do you believe Jesus or do you believe the snake? Is happiness and joy in life found in Christ, as Jesus said, or do you have to take matters into your own hands and experiment?. If this were not a large group, I could go to the balcony or I could go over this side or the other, and I could ask those people to stand. And I could say, "Tell them. Tell them that what I'm trying to tell them is true. Tell them about what you did. Tell them that you came to Christ. And tell them if it was worth it. And throughout this room, there would be people who have walked down that path, who have said "no" to God. And then they turned around and came back, and they would say to you, "I wouldn't change it for anything!"

Paul says it is all garbage in comparison to the knowledge of Christ. I hope today for those of you who are still trying to wrestle with how you are going to live, that you will come to Jesus Christ. In Him is life. In Him is joy. Only in Him. I am aware that when I stand to speak, I am just kind of reaping a harvest. God has been working in your life, and I am just the instrument to use words to tell you what God is doing in your life. You realize more than anybody you need to come to Him. You have been going down the wrong road. You have found that out now, and you want to turn around and come to Him. You have come to church. Now, take the next step. Come and say, "Pastor, I want to come and give my heart and my life to Christ." He'll meet you here. Come.