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**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

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**The Worth of Knowing Christ Jesus**

**Philippians 3:8-11**

**Prayer:** *This morning I just again thank you for what you have provided for us. We are so grateful and thankful that you have provided this venue, that you have provided your Son, that you have provided your word and that you provide your Holy Spirit to us, Lord. So we pray this morning, we ask for the presence of your Holy Spirit as we open up your book, as we look into it and we pray that would be of permanent value. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well when we last left Paul he was battling the judaizers over the false teachings known as the gospel plus. That's a gospel that consists of placing your faith in Jesus Christ's death on the cross plus adhering to some aspects of Jewish ceremonial law and in particular circumcision. According to the judaizers this was required for salvation and Paul says in *Philippians 3:2*, he says: *Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no*

*confidence in the flesh.* And as I mentioned last time Paul did not mince words to describe the judaizers as dogs, as evildoers, as mutilators, because in his mind they were far more dangerous than Rome or the Jews. These are folks that you would like to take home for dinner, I mean, they looked like believers, they talked like believers, they acted like believers, but in reality they were not. That's why Paul was so exorcised. That's why he was so upset. His beloved Philippians were under attack and they didn't even realize it. So Paul goes on to compare his life to those who insist on relying on their own works righteousness, and he concludes that in spite of his exemplary life, his entire existence amounts to a pile of dung compared to the perfection that the law requires. Paul summed it all up by pointing out that adding dung to perfection doesn't elevate the dung, it just attempts to demean God's perfection, and God will not have it.

So we asked last week if all of my best efforts are literally a pile of rubbish and filth, how can I ever possibly earn God's affection? Well, the answer is you can't. It is there as a gift, period. And again, I have no idea why God chose to love me or you but he has. And once having fixed that love, he will not ever take it away. There's not a thing that you and I can do to increase it or diminish it because we didn't cause it in the first place, and we certainly didn't earn it. So Paul goes on to say in *Philippians*

3:8-11, he says: *Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus 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 and be found in him, 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 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.* Paul says nothing else matters in my life but Christ. Then he breaks that down into these five parts. Paul says I will give up everything in order to gain Christ, know Christ, suffer with Christ, die with Christ and then rise again with Christ in his resurrection.

So let's take them one by one. First Paul says, *for his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.* How do we gain Christ? Well Paul gained Christ through what we call "imputation." I know that's a fifty-cent word and I don't like using fifty-cent words particularly when they're not in scripture, but it's important that you understand this concept and so I want to go back to a study I did a few years back about the whole concept of imputed righteousness to give you an example of what it means to gain

Christ, and I want to do that by pointing out how Abraham gained righteousness. This is *Romans 4*. It says: *What then can we say that Abraham, our physical ancestor, has found? If Abraham was justified by works, he has something to brag about -- but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him for righteousness.* So Abraham gained righteousness and he gained it through imputation. I mean do you know what imputed righteousness is? It is righteousness by association. Make no mistake, God sees us as righteous but he doesn't see it based on what we do. He sees us as righteous not by what we do but by what Christ has done for us on the cross. And by paying the penalty for our sins, Jesus made me righteous by imputation. I know it's still a fifty-cent word, so I want to unpack it just a little bit. I want to give you some examples.

Most of you know that I am a fan of the New York football Giants, and some of you may know that that can be a very difficult thing. Sometimes they're very, very good and sometimes -- well actually most times they really stink, truly awful. And my kids are Giant fans as well and frequently we'll get together and cheer each other on or to commiserate. And when we lose we say things like "we stunk;" and when we win, we say things like "Oh, we totally dominated them." And there's a very strange pronoun in those sentences. It's the pronoun "we." I mean an outside observer

could look at a conversation like that and ask the question what do you mean by that word "we?" You might ask, did you put on pads? Did you put on a helmet? Did you make any tackles? Did you catch any passes? The answer to that of course would be, no. It's the players who win the games. But we don't say, yeah, the players won the game. We say we won the game. I mean somehow I personally claim that victory as if I did it myself even though I was nowhere near the playing field. I mean when I can say "we won" or "we lost," I'm speaking about imputation. The players do the labor and I get the credit, or in the case of the Giants, the blame. I mean in a generic sense athletes represent a school or a city and to the extent that you identify with them, they represent you. When the New York Giants lose, New York loses and to some extent I as a New Yorker lose. Well, the difference is that when football representatives fail, we just lose a game. It's no big deal. On a far more serious note it is imputation that make all of us unfit before God. You see we share Adam's guilt and we share that guilt through Adam's fall again through imputation. When Adam fell in the Garden of Eden, I was nowhere near that place. I never even saw the fruit, I never even touched it or tasted it, but I am no less guilty than Adam because he represents me. So when he ate that fruit, I ate that fruit as well. And when Adam fell it was the biggest and worst catastrophe mankind had ever experienced because Adam was in fact you and me. When Adam fell, we all fell

with him. As the ditty goes: "In Adam's fall, we sinned all."

*Romans 5:12* describes it. It says: *Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man -- that man was Adam -- and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.* He said well, that's not fair. I mean why in the world should I be considered guilty for something that somebody else did? I didn't eat that fruit, so why am I being blamed for it? Well, first you have to understand that the person that was chosen as your representative, that is Adam, that person was unlike anybody you or I have ever met or will ever meet in our lifetime. You see, Adam was sinless and up until the time he fell, Adam was flawless. You and I have no idea what that must have been like. You see before he fell Adam had no sin and no predilection towards sin like you and I have. I mean that's something that we're all now born with, it's this innate desire toward rebellion. Adam didn't have that. So Adam freely chose in a way we can't even imagine because we've never experienced that kind of freedom. But Adam freely chose to rebel against God. So if you're going to complain about the unfairness of your representation, understand that God gave us a flawless representative. Never in the history of mankind has there ever been another flawless person, with one exception and that's the Lord Jesus Christ who had to come and rescue us from Adam's fall. I mean Adam got us into this mess by imputing his rebellion

to all of us. And if you insist that's not fair, I'm being held responsible for Adam's sin, you have to understand it's the exact same process -- that is to say, imputation -- that now makes us fit for heaven. Again, we go back to Romans 5. It says: *For if, because of one man's trespass -- again that's Adam -- death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life, through the one man Jesus Christ. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.* You see by God's grace we were given another perfect representative, one who did not fall, and once again it was by imputation. Jesus Christ became the guilty one even though he was one hundred percent innocent. He took on my guilt again by imputation. He didn't do the crime but he paid the penalty. And when Jesus Christ paid for my guilt and all of my sins on the cross and I placed my faith in him as my Savior, I become righteous even though I was two thousand years and ten thousand miles from where that righteousness took place, Calvary. I become righteous again by imputation. I mean I gained Christ in the same way that Abraham gained righteousness, not by works but by faith. Christ did it but I had it reckoned to my account by faith. Adam made us all guilty by imputation, Christ makes all who trust in him righteous by imputation. Have I said the word imputation enough? That's how Paul gained Christ.

So moving on, this is again *Philippians 3:8*. It says: *Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus 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 and be found in him, 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.* And secondly Paul speaks of knowing Christ. He says in verse 10: *That I may know him and the power of his resurrection.* Well Jesus himself said in *John 17*: *"And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."*

So how do we know Christ? How do we know Christ and the power of his resurrection? Well first of all we don't get to know Christ like you get to know anything else. I mean it's not like the knowledge of Christ yields to inquiry like the knowledge of chemistry or physics or philosophy or any other scholarly endeavor might yield to some type of scholarly inquiry. Christ is far, far too big to be ever known this way. You see, knowing God, it's not the end product of studying God, rather it's the end product of God allowing himself to be known. And that privilege he extends only to his sheep, they're the ones who hear his voice, they're the ones who follow him. And following is a daily thing, I mean, your ability to grow in your knowledge of Christ can ebb and flow



depending on where your heart is. And we saw that with Paul in his relationship with the Galatians. Paul recognized that the Galatians who had started out on fire to know God, they're now going backwards because they're entertaining these false gospel-plus teachers. Paul said the only way you can begin to know Christ is by recognizing that God first has to consent to being known by you and then you begin to know him. This is what he said in *Galatians 4*. He said: *In the past, when you didn't know God, you were enslaved to things that by nature are not gods. But now, since you know God, or rather have become known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and bankrupt elemental forces? Do you want to be enslaved to them all over again?*

So how do we go about knowing Christ? How do we do that? I mean our culture is filled with dozens of different Jesuses and they're all touted by different groups with different agendas. So how do we get to the real Jesus? I go back to God's words to Jeremiah. This was spoken while Israel was in bondage in battle and what God told Jeremiah is how we can find the real Jesus. This is how God said to Jeremiah in *Jeremiah 29*. He said: *For I know the plans I have for you" -- this is the LORD's declaration -- "plans for your welfare, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. You will call to Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your*

*heart. I will be found by you" -- this is the LORD's declaration.*

You see we find Jesus only when Jesus allows us to find him. That only happens when we seek him with all of our hearts. I mean Paul's desperate desire was that he could know Christ and the power of his resurrection. It might seem strange because I mean after all Paul had the greatest and most intimate knowledge of anyone of Christ. I don't think there was any other human being that had greater and more in depth knowledge of Christ than Paul. I mean just think about Paul, I mean, Paul's first introduced to Christ by a vision of the living Christ, it's knocking him off his horse and explaining to him the role that he's going to have in the future and that's followed by Paul having all of these different interactions with Christ and eventually being taken up into third heaven and being shown visions that no other human has been shown. This is what he said in *2 Corinthians 12*. He said: *I know a man in Christ who was caught up into the third heaven 14 years ago. Whether he was in the body or out of the body, I don't know, God knows. I know that this man -- whether in the body or out of the body I don't know, God knows -- was caught up into paradise. He heard inexpressible words, which a man is not allowed to speak.*

On a practical level there is nobody on earth who had more exposure to knowing Christ than Paul. In addition to all of that, Paul was given miraculous powers to heal the sick and raise the dead. I

mean if anyone should have been saying, "I thank you, God, that I already know you and the power of your resurrection," you'd think it would be Paul. But that's not his attitude at all. I mean Paul is the source of the miraculous power of the Spirit of God and yet his greatest and deepest desire is to grow in the knowledge of God. I mean it seems like Paul was never satisfied. But there's a reason for that and the reason why Paul's desire to know God was never satisfied is that it can never be satisfied because God is infinite and eternal and what he has for us in terms of knowing him is also infinite and eternal. I mean if you've ever thought about heaven, if you've ever thought about eternity, you might come to the conclusion that eternity itself can be terribly frightening. I mean even if you can imagine it to be everything you can possibly want, I mean, I don't care how wonderful you can imagine heaven to be, after a million or a billion or a trillion years, anything that you and I can imagine will have long run its course in terms of being able to satisfy, with one exception, that is the glory of God. See, Paul knew that all of his exposure to God was just a mere taste and the more knowledge of Christ he got, the more desperately he wanted even more. And it is that process of eternally growing our hunger for and satisfaction in Christ that will satisfy us for all of eternity. That's what we look forward to. I think of what Paul said in *2 Corinthians 3*. He said: *We all, with unveiled faces, are looking as in a mirror at the glory*

*of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; this is from the Lord who is the Spirit.*

I remember way, way back when I was in grammar school, I remember the Nuns telling us something about what they call "the beatific vision." They were explaining it as they understood it. My ten-year-old mind understood them to say that for all of eternity we were going to sit on clouds and stare at Jesus. I thought that sounded amazingly to me like the other place, not the place that I wanted to go. I just couldn't comprehend why anybody would find that heavenly. I think I get it now. You see the fact is my vision of heaven back then was great houses, great food, great entertainment, great thrills, great enjoyment, all of those other things that couldn't possibly still satisfy after ten thousand years let alone a million or a billion years. What can satisfy for all eternity though is an ever-expanding ability to know Christ as Paul is expressing it. I just picture an eternity of growing from glory to glory, each of them with a deepening ability to comprehend an all-encompassing majesty of the glory of God and knowing that this process, it's going to go on forever. Anything else to me is frankly terrifying.

So how do we begin not to know Christ then but to know Christ here? How do we begin to know Christ in this life? Well, as it is today

here on planet earth we have but one source of groundedness to understand who Jesus is and that is the Bible. I mean Jesus made it clear that our understanding of who he is must come from scripture. He told us that the entire Bible was written specifically about him. And when he was arguing with the Pharisees, he had this ongoing conversation in *John 5:39*. Jesus says: *"You pore over the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them, yet they testify about Me,"* he said. As the argument intensified, Jesus pointed out to the Pharisees who had set their hope on the scriptures which were written by Moses but they didn't understand that it was written about Jesus. This is what he said in *John 5:45*. He said: *"Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, because he wrote about Me. But if you don't believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"* The scripture's about Jesus. But the Bible alone is not nearly enough to begin the process of knowing Christ. It has to be the Bible plus the Holy Spirit. And the whole process is begun not in your head, it's begun in your heart. Jesus said in *John 6:37*: *"Everyone the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will never cast out."* But you know Jesus, he made that statement knowing that anybody who comes to him comes because God first has done a work in their life and in their hearts. If you have a heart to know God,

trust me, you didn't get that on your own. You got that as a gift from God.

Paul not only wanted to gain Christ but he spent every waking moment trying to know Christ. Part of that included our third point which is suffering with Christ. *Philippians 3:10* says: *That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings.* Paul didn't just say that there. Paul's writings speak of it often. Paul wants us to share in Christ's sufferings. In *Romans 8* he's speaking about believers. He says: *And if children, then heirs -- heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.* In *Philippians 1:29* he says: *For it has been given to you on Christ's behalf not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for Him, having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I have.* This is all part of Paul's past, this is all part of Paul's makeup. I mean you go back to the very beginning, you remember what God said to Ananias about Paul. I mean God has just blinded Paul, he's knocked him off his horse and he sent the now blind Paul to Ananias to be healed. So God is having this little conversation with Ananias. And Ananias is balking, he's saying I don't want to have anything to do with that guy Saul, he's bad news. And this is what Ananias said in *Acts 9* and what God said in response. He said: *"Go, for he -- that is Paul -- is a*

*chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."* Why do you suppose God said that? I mean do you think that God was just trying to get back at Paul for all the times that he attacked the church or was suffering a tool that God used to bring Paul to a depth of understanding of his Lord's sacrifice that Paul couldn't get any other way? Paul was God's chosen vessel to share that message through suffering, and so are we. That mantle belongs to us as well. You see, our understanding of pain is woefully limited until we experience it ourselves.

I have a friend who's a physician who worked in Hospice and she did a lot of work in pain management. She told me once that her fondest wish would be that somebody could invent a machine that you could hook up to doctors' brains so that they would receive the exact same pain that their patients were experiencing. She said it would revolutionize pain management overnight. We have a name for that. We call that empathy. I mean it's feeling someone else's pain. You know obviously I have no idea what the pain of child birth is really like and I never will. My ability to sympathize and empathize is limited by my ability to never really enter into that kind of circumstance. I mean I can sympathize with my wife and my daughters in their pain but you women, you know all too well

that only you can readily identify with that. Lots of times when my daughters and my daughters-in-law get together, they start talking about child birth and it's almost like watching a female account of war stories. And in a very real sense it is. I mean I thank God that I don't have to give birth 'cause I don't think I have the strength to do it. I couldn't pull it off. And I see when the women get together, I see the difference between truly entering into an experience physically and trying to know what that experience is and just trying to be empathetic and sympathetic without ever having participated. Jesus Christ entered into this world precisely so that God himself could participate in the experience of the pain of his fallen creatures. And having experienced every single thing we experience, to do it without sinning. Jesus knew by experience what suffering was all about. Sympathy is the ability to feel someone's pain. Empathy is the ability to fully enter into that pain and full empathy comes from experience. Jesus knew by experience what it meant to be hot and cold and hungry and thirsty and tired. He also knew by experience just what it meant to be lonely and rejected and abandoned and hated without a cause. He also knew again by experience exactly how it felt to be beaten and flogged and spit on, stripped naked and crucified. *Hebrews 2:14* says: *Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of*



*death, that is, the devil.*

I had a conversation just last week with a non-believer. He said I can't, I just cannot believe in a loving God because of all the pain and the suffering that just surrounds us that we see all of the time. He was talking to me about a series of films that he'd seen about the war in Germany and he said, you know that when the Germans were retreating into the countryside prior to their ultimate defeat, he said, they would go into towns and they would take women and strip them and crucify them, nail them to the sides of barns. He said, I can't believe in a God who would ever just sit by and allow something that evil to happen. I said to him, well, you know there's a dozen different ways that you can respond to an atrocity like that. There's the Darwinian response which says there is no God, we all know that "nature is red in tooth and claw," that's just the way it goes. And there's the Buddhist response that says, well, this life is awful. Perhaps the next one will be better. But I said to that person, I said, look, I believe in a God who was stripped himself, who was nailed to the side of a tree. I said, doesn't that count for anything? Not really. He wasn't moved in the slightest. See, our God is no stranger to suffering. *Isaiah 53* says: *He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.* I mean is it surprising at all that God would expect the very ones that he is now shaping

and molding into the very image of his Son should also not be strangers to suffering? I mean Jesus said in *Mark 8*: "*Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.*" Joni Eareckson Tada wondered aloud how could he possibly take up a cross without suffering? Suffering is a sharing tool. It's a sharing tool that God uses to bring us into the experience of his Son, and it's one that Paul wants to participate in. As he says in *Philippians 3:10*: *That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings.*

And fourthly, Paul wanted to become like Christ in his death. He says: *That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.* Listen to how Paul puts this in *Romans 6*. He says: *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin.*

I think I know what Paul was getting at. You see, the person I was before I came to Christ, he's no longer alive. That person died the day that I became a believer in Jesus Christ and it's been some 48 years now. I mean so it's hard now for me to look back at that person who's been dead for so long a time and just remember who he was. I mean I know he was selfish and self-absorbed and self-centered and miserable. I know that his motivations and desires were terrible. I can't tell you how glad I am that he's dead. The problem is that you don't realize any of the blessings of the resurrected life until you really put the former life to death. We think of the apostle Paul, I mean, think of him, he's now sitting in his jail cell and he spent the last few years of his life, he's been stoned and beaten and shipwrecked all for standing up for the gospel, and he's sitting in this cell and he's looking back to that old dead man named Saul. And he's thinking of Saul who participated in the execution of Stephen for the very same faith. He sees him going door to door, pulling Christians out of homes and seeing to it that they're imprisoned and executed for the very same faith that he now believes in. Paul could look back at his guy named Saul and see for a fact that that person was long dead and buried in Christ. The same is true for any believer in Christ. I think of some of my sins that have died that same kind of death. You know I picture them, they're all grouped together in some kind of power strip. You know those kind of power strips,

that you plug them in, they've got six different outlets on them. And I look at my power strip at that time and one of them was sex, another was drugs, another was rock and roll, and then next to that there's lying and blasphemy and coveting and all of those things and you look back like Paul looking back at Saul, then you realize that the Holy Spirit has literally pulled the plug on that whole power strip. It just doesn't have any power any more. I mean it wasn't instantaneous and it took effort, but those sins have been placed on the cross and buried along with Christ. I mean by the power of God's Holy Spirit I can look back through time when I was very comfortable with those sins. I now see them as dead and buried in terms of the power that they now have for me. That's the good news. The bad news is that those sins have been replaced by far more subtle sins like envy and jealousy and laziness, then you realize that this whole prospect of sin continues over and over and over again until the day that we die. We call that process sanctification. You also recognize that we still have the ability, every one of us, to take that plug and plug it right back in again and re-energize all of those sins back to life and we call that back-sliding. That's why we believers fight a battle constantly against the flesh to keep that which has died dead. Listen to how Paul puts this in *Romans 7*. He said: *So I discover this principle: When I want to do what is good, evil is with me. For in my inner self I joyfully agree with God's law. But I see a*

*different law in the parts of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and taking me prisoner to the law of sin in the parts of my body. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this dying body? That's Paul's dilemma but Paul's desire to gain Christ, to know Christ, to suffer with Christ, to die with Christ finally meets its fifth and final goal, and that is: That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. See, the surest way to be free of everything is to be dead. The good news for a dead man is there's no longer any threats, there's no longer any coercion, there's no longer anything that can compel you. The bad news is that you're dead. But what if you could have the benefit and the freedom of being dead to those threats and still be very much alive? That's what Paul means by resurrection power. Paul wants to die in Christ but then he wants to experience that resurrection power. This is what he said in Romans 6:8. He says: Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. So in the same way that I died to sin the moment that I accepted Christ as my Savior, so too was I*

born again, a brand new creature no longer under the power of sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Again *2 Corinthians 5*:  
*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away, and look, new things have come.* So along with Paul I can say death is the resurrected me that I now am. The Spirit of Christ has taken out of me my stone cold heart and replaced it with a heart of flesh that now finds its greatest joy and deepest pleasure in following God's statutes and observing his laws. In other words my great joy is now living as Paul wanted to live: Gaining Christ, knowing Christ, suffering with Christ, dying with Christ and being raised again with Christ. That's a life worth living.

Here's the big question. Does that describe your life or has it been reduced to a bunch of rules spoken and unspoken that you adhere to in order to make sure that, oh, when I die, I get to go to heaven. That is such a pathetically short-sighted vision of what the Christian life is compared to what Paul and God want for us.

So how do we pull this all together? Well, I listened to a sermon the other day, Vanessa sent out a sermon to encourage all the elders. It was a sermon by Matt Chandler, a wonderful, wonderful sermon. But in that sermon he talked about plausibility

structures. He described it as a sociological term describing the way in which you believe the world works. You know you get up in the morning, you have a cup of coffee, you flip on the TV, you watch *Good Morning America*, you drink your coffee, you go off to work, you come home, watch a little TV, surf the net, and you wind up having your understanding of how the world works, how your universe works shaped and molded by those outside forces. They define what makes sense to you. Well, over and against that plausibility structure is a second plausibility structure and it's called "the church." And it too offers an understanding of the way life itself works, but it stands in direct contrast to the other ones that make sense to the folks all around us. Now for the first time in decades the world's plausibility structure is literally collapsing. I mean COVID and politics and shutdowns and cancel culture and economic collapse, they've all stripped away the facade that this plausibility structure offered up by the world makes sense. And more than ever before Paul's words are playing themselves out in real time and this is what he said. He said: *Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.*

See, the darker this world gets, the more the light of the gospel

enables us to shine like stars. Jesus said *let your light so shine among men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.* That's why we're here. That's what our task is; that's what our job is. You see, we believers have a vastly different plausibility structure than the world does, but our structure is not just plausible, it's actual. It's real. That makes far more sense than anything this world can offer. It's Christ, gained Christ, known Christ, suffered with Christ, died with and Christ resurrected with, it's our plausibility and it's our plausibility to share. I mean the fact that this is a crooked generation is now undeniable. And now as we divide right to left, left to right, we sense that everybody's got an agenda, and there's no one's who is not crooked and twisted. God isn't crooked or twisted. He's just the opposite. God is full of glory and grace and truth. And our plausibility structure is centered on him. So we want what Paul wants: *That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*

Let's pray.

*Father, I thank you for the opportunity that has been presented to us. We can shine like stars in the night and the reason why is because this light outside is growing darker and darker by the minute. I just think of the plausibility structure that we're in*



*right now called "the church" and what a marvelous thing it is and what we have and the gift that we have and the gift that Paul has just elucidated, how we can gain Christ and know Christ and suffer with Christ and die with Christ and live with Christ, that's what matters. And so I thank you, Lord, for giving us this gift. I just pray by the power of your Holy Spirit you would let us use it. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*