

## Being Genuine About Jesus

Our epistle reading today is a really strong challenge to be fair dinkum, to be genuine about Jesus. Do you need encouragement to be like that? You want to be like that, but so many other things get in the way, don't they? We know that there is nothing better in life, nothing finer in life, nothing more enjoyable in life, than knowing the Lord Jesus Christ. But so often we don't feel like it is. And if someone looked at our diary they might think it's not really a priority for us. And even though we express our knowing Jesus Sunday by Sunday with our brothers and sisters it sometimes feels a bit of a fake, or an uphill battle. And then someone pokes fun at us, or criticises us or condemns us because we are lovers of Jesus. Someone points to one of the many awful things so-called followers of Jesus have done and we don't have an answer, or we shrivel up with embarrassment and shame. Is it really worth it?

We know we could work out answers, or strategies, but the primary thing is not a strategy or a policy or a protocol. It is striving to know Jesus better.

In Philippians chapter 3 and verses 4–14 Paul speaks about himself – openly and honestly. And he uses the very well-known model which philosophers down the centuries have used to speak about human life and existence:

- (a) where we come from (i.e. the origin of our existence);
- (b) why we are here (i.e. the purpose of our existence); and
- (c) where we are going (i.e. the ultimate destiny of our existence).

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These are the questions every culture uses to make sense of human existence. They're the questions we all ask at some time in our lives. So, what were the answers given by the apostle?

First question: "Where did he come from?"

He answers this not in terms of his geographical origin, but his cultural and religious origin. And his was up there with the best. He had an A1 pedigree, the very best family tree entry:

Listen to verses 5:

*5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.*

We don't need to know much to be able to catch the pride he once felt in his identity. He was a top shelf Jewish product. His was a pedigree few had, and that was admired by all. His involvement in his culture was deep and rich, and he would and did do anything to preserve it – even up to murder of cultural opponents. He lived in and lived by God's own culture. No better background was possible.

And yet – he tells us the purpose of his existence had been completely overturned. Completely.

How does he now answer the question: "Why am I here?"

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*Verses 7 – 11: 7 But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. 10 I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.*

His background no longer determined his purpose in life in the present.

We remember how this happened on the road to Damascus when the risen Lord Jesus Christ met him and the persecutor became a follower. The terroriser of believers became their brother. The enemy of Jesus became his beloved and loving servant. So radical is his transformation that his wonderful pedigree, so envied by others and of which he had been so proud he now describes as “garbage”.

He now knew that God accepted him not on the basis of his cultural background and impeccable religious behaviour. That, he saw, was a dead end. Literally. Rather, he knew, as every true believer knows, that he was in the right with God because of Jesus. Because of Jesus’ perfect life, his sin-bearing death and his sin and death defeating resurrection. And that simply by trusting Jesus, NOT himself, Paul knew he was truly a child of God, and inheritor of the kingdom of heaven. So his life now, the purpose of his existence is found in living more and more like Jesus. Remember what he says in verses 10 and 11?

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*10 I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.*

This is so far from human achievement and boasting as to be ludicrous. It involved knowing Christ – knowing in his own life the power of Christ’s resurrection to raise a Jewish scholar of impeccable pedigree and cultural respect yet truly dead towards God; to raise him from the darkness of sin and death to a new life as a forgiven child of God prepared to suffer for identifying as a Christian; knowing even death would not bring an end to knowing Jesus, but would be the gateway to a deeper and complete knowledge of him.

And what of the future? “Where was he going?”

*12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

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He now understands that not because of his culture or his religious performance, God had called him. Like he has called every one of us who believe. And called us because of Jesus. Jesus, who he says “took hold of me” – Paul (and you and I as well) did not take hold of, or choose Jesus. Jesus took hold of him – and us (if we belong to him). But, this did not mean passive knowledge, letting Jesus do all the work in the relationship. Notice the language from athletics: “I press on”; “straining towards what is ahead”; “press on towards the goal” – which is all that it means to be with Christ Jesus in the heavenly realms.

Friends, what an encouragement there is here for us! To see the clarity, the focus, the passion, the hard work, the priority of our forefather in the faith; yes, he achieved a huge amount in his life for the Lord Jesus Christ. But here we see how he saw himself. And it sets the pattern for how we are to see ourselves.

No matter what our background, culture or achievements – Paul urges us to see knowing Jesus as beyond comparison.

No matter how much we may be involved in community, job, society, relationships, Paul urges us to see knowing Jesus as the priority.

And no matter what we hope for the future, or plan for our life to be headed, Paul would urge us to see that all that matters is knowing Jesus more and more until we reach our heavenly home when we shall know as we are now known by the Lord.