**BCM Bible Study: February 20/21, 2019**

**Philippians 3:1-4:1: True Faith**

The Problem: **Read Philippians 3:1**-**6**

* From any general Bible knowledge that you may have, what issue is Paul confronting here?
  + Paul is confronting a group of Judaizers: Jewish Christians who insisted that Gentile Christians submit to the Mosaic law, including circumcision. According to Old Testament law, to be circumcised meant that you were in the covenant community of God’s people. However, Jesus demonstrates time and again that the law was good, but was a mere pointer to the true righteousness that only he would perfectly demonstrate (because he is God). Jesus fulfilled the law through his perfect life and established a new covenant that we could enter into by faith alone, not by works of the law. In light of this new reality, to practice certain rituals from the law was to put “confidence in the flesh,” not in the saving work of Jesus.
* We all have an innate desire to be a “good person.” As Christians, it is very tempting to try to earn a holy standing before God. In verses 4-6, Paul illustrates that no one has more reason to boast than him – he had adhered to the very letter of the law that God gave his people!
  + In what ways are you tempted to put your spiritual confidence in your achievements or good deeds?
  + Why is this sort of confidence contradictory to the gospel?

Knowing Jesus: **Read Philippians 3:7-11**

* “Paul tells us that he now regards his previous ‘assets’ not merely as without worth but as positively damaging, as spiritual ‘liabilities.’ In the process of re-evaluation Paul perceived that the things he had hitherto viewed as benefiting him had in reality been working to destroy him because they were blinding him to his need for the real righteousness which God required.” (Moises Silva) More than that, he called them “rubbish” – a word that can mean human waste!
  + Think again of the things in which you are tempted to place your spiritual confidence, things that you can perceive help you climb the latter of holiness. In what way would it re-orient your life if you were to consider these things as “rubbish?”
* The goal of these verses is not merely to obtain a “non-guilty” status before a judge. The real prize is knowing Christ as we put our faith and hope in him.
  + According to these verses, what does it mean to know Christ? What are the implications?
  + The participation of believers in Christ’s death includes not only their definitive breach with sin but also the sufferings they undergo by virtue of their union with Christ.
    - Have you ever experienced this reality? What are some of the painful things that come with following the Biblical commands to “take up your cross” and “die to yourself?”
  + This isn’t a cold command to live a joyless life full of denying your instincts for pleasure. It is a life of faith, trusting that being in relationship with God brings about the most joyful kind of life!
    - How have you experienced what Paul is saying about everything seeming as garbage compared to knowing Christ?
* I have often heard of people who are wary of heaven. It doesn’t sound that great the way that it is talked about in popular culture – clouds, angels, harps, eternal singing, etc. However, the true Christian hope and nature of eternal life is resurrection from the dead and living in perfect relationship to God in a perfectly restored environment.
  + In what way do you long for this hope?
  + We can experience a foretaste of this eternal hope and joy now as we come to know Christ more intimately.
    - How would you describe the state of your relationship to God? In what ways would you like that to improve?
    - In light of what we have talked about today, what can you do to remove your “spiritual liabilities” and come to know Christ more?

Stand Firm: **Read Philippians 3:12-4:1**

* Verses 4:1 serves as both a summary for this section and a launching point into the next. The general exhortation is to “stand firm.”
* In verses 12-16, what are the dangers against which the Philippians must stand firm?
  + In v.13, the things which “lie behind” can either be overtly negative (past sins) or positive (pride in genuine spiritual progress). Which do you tend to struggle with? In what way to they inhibit your walk with God?
  + More than just giving a warning about focusing on the past, Paul tells the Philippians to focus on the future. Paul talks about this in more detail in Colossians: **Read Colossians 3:1-5, 12.** (Feel free to read 1-17 if you have time)
  + What “things that are on earth” keep you from setting your mind on “things that are above”?
* In verses 17-21, what is the danger against which the Philippians must stand firm?
  + Paul says that the Philippians should be citizens of heaven, not of Rome. To be a Roman citizen came with great honor and great privilege. By contrast, Paul is calling them to set aside their “rights” for the sake of others and the gospel.
  + What are some of the privileges of being an American citizen? What do you tend to assume will true of your life because of your citizenship?
  + How might living as a citizen of heaven differ from living as an American citizen? How might these two citizenships clash?
    - Hint: Think about how unnatural Phil. 2:3-4 is to most Americans!
  + Again, Paul does not just give a warning – he offers hope. What is our hope as we imitate the selfless life of Christ?
  + How would your life change if you fully oriented around this hope?