

Growing in Righteousness

4. Press On

Philippians 3:4-14

Jesus was once asked, "Are only a few to be saved?" Jesus answered, "Struggle to enter in the narrow door; for I tell you that many will try to enter and not be able." (Luke 13:23-24 NEB)

We don't quite understand that, do we? We think being saved is fairly easy. All you have to do is confess your sins and profess your faith in Christ as your Lord and Savior. We say, "Wait a minute, Lord. What struggle? All you have to do is have faith to be saved." And Paul would say to us, "Who said faith was easy?"

Paul, after all, was the one who taught us that we are saved by faith and not by works. Paul had tried saving himself by his works. He was one of the most zealous of the Pharisees. He had dedicated his life to winning his salvation by being perfectly obedient to the Law. But when the Risen Christ appeared to him on the road to Damascus, he realized that none of his efforts had moved him any closer to salvation. In Christ he saw what true righteousness is, and he knew that he could never make himself truly righteous, no matter how hard he tried. He realized that only Christ could save him. He would have to trust Christ to save him.

Paul never changed in his belief that only the righteous will be saved. What changed was his understanding of how to become righteous. He no longer believed that righteousness could be gained by forcing himself to conform to the demands of the Law of Moses. He now understood that he would have to be transformed from the inside out. He couldn't do that for himself. Christ would have to do that for him.

And Paul never believed that this process of transformation would be quick or easy.

Here in Philippians Paul says, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own..."

Paul was saying that he was not yet righteous enough to be saved. He was still struggling to enter in through the narrow door. He was pressing on.

There on the road to Damascus Paul had seen what true righteousness is: It is to care more about righteousness than your own life. It is to be willing to die for righteousness. It is Christ on the Cross.

Saving faith is to be willing to put your life on the line for Christ, believing that Christ has the power to restore your life. As Paul said, "I want to know Christ

and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death...”

Those who will share in the resurrection of Christ are the ones who have the faith to go to the cross with him. That’s what it means to place yourself completely in Christ’s hands, without reservations.

When we understand that, we can understand why Jesus said, “Struggle to enter in, for many will try and fail.”

Do I have enough faith to go to the cross with Christ? I think probably all of us would have to join with Paul in saying, “Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal.”

And that’s all right, as long as we continue on with Paul in saying, “But I press on to make it my own...”

No, you may not have the faith to go to the cross with Christ as yet. But do you want that faith? Are you pressing on to make it your own? That’s the real issue.

In fact, all of us, at this point should be praying, “Lord, I believe. Help thou my unbelief.” Because we do need help if we are to have that kind of faith. We can no more muster up saving faith on our own than we can muster up righteousness on our own. God has to do it for us.

If we are to ever have a saving faith, it will be because God has inspired that faith within us. We can’t do it on our own.

So, if God will have to give us that faith, where is our struggle? What God requires of us is that we want that depth of faith. Do you want to be able to go to the cross with Christ? That’s all God asks of us, that we earnestly and truly desire to have enough faith to be able to put our lives on the line for righteousness’ sake, that we can have the faith to be able to follow Christ to the cross.

Do you pray, “God, give me the faith to lay down my life for Christ?” That is a prayer you can be certain God will grant.

But why would someone pray such a prayer? Do you really want to die? No. But you are not really alive until you are no longer afraid to die. Complete faith frees us from all fear. And when we are totally unafraid, we are free to truly live. We are no longer afraid to do what we know is right. We are no longer afraid to really love people.

Faith is liberating.

So, we pray for the faith to be able to lay down our lives for Christ, so that we can receive the life that Christ intended for us to have, a life free from all fear, a life of joy, abundant life.

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