

## **Preserving Joy in Ministry** *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*

### **Knowing Christ** *Philippians 3:1 – 21*

#### **Introduction: Multi-Ethnicity**

I'd like you to reflect on your experience in multi-ethnic situations, especially Christian ones. Have you ever wondered why InterVarsity often has multiple fellowships at one campus? MIT, for example, has an Asian, a Black, and a Multi-Ethnic fellowship. Is that bad? Or some fellowships have ethnic specific Bible studies. Is there anything wrong with that? How about here at Chapter Camp. We have a track called Race and the Gospel. Is that okay? Can we talk about that? Even in worship times, we rotate who is up here and we try to sing songs from different traditions and styles. Now maybe we could do more of that, but should we be so conscientious about that? Why is InterVarsity like this? Do other campus ministries do this kind of thing?

The way we do things stems from two central convictions in Paul's heart that are core to the gospel. (1) Jesus is Lord of Israel and Lord of the world. Therefore, people of every ethnicity, tribe, and tongue need to know him. (2) They do not have to become just like one another. They worship in their own languages. Although Jesus challenges their sins and prejudices and hatreds, to some degree they keep their own cultures and preferences. We seen this in this presentation. By showing you this, I want to start addressing some of your questions, and also set the context for our time in Philippians. I want you to understand what a hard job Paul had. (see ppt on *Paul's Letters in Context of Christian Political Identity and Mission*)

#### **Context in Philippians**

That is an appropriate beginning to Philippians 3, where we are continuing to eavesdrop on Paul's conversation with the Philippians. Yesterday we heard about having the same mind, the mind of Christ, in facing troubles, even troubles leading to death. In chapter 2, we sensed that the major temptation Paul was steering them away from was the temptation to just be Roman to escape the suffering. And in that context, Paul reminded them that Caesar is not Lord. Jesus is Lord of the world; he sits on the highest of all thrones. Here in chapter 3, we are going to find Paul steering them away from the temptation to become Jewish. For this reason, his argument is different. He says that Jesus now embodies the Jewish hopes.

We can break down this passage into 3 sections: First, you don't have to become culturally Jewish, in v.1 – 6. Second, but you do have to know the Jewish Messiah, in v.7 – 14, because he embodies what the Jews were correctly wanting: righteousness and resurrection. Third, and you inherit the Jewish hopes, in v.15 – 21.

#### **You Don't Have to Become Culturally Jewish: v.1 – 6**

Paul says in v.1, "Finally, my brothers and sisters," and you'd expect him to be done with his letter in just a few more sentences. But no! He's only halfway done with the letter! He says, "Rejoice in the Lord." Now why does Paul say all this? Because there are those who would have you rejoice about lesser things. In verse 1 he says it's a warning. "To write the same things to you is not troublesome to me," so these 'same things' of chapter 3 must restate the same idea as chapter 2. Then he adds at the end of v.1, "and for you it is a safeguard." So if chapter 2 was a safeguard, then chapter 3 is also a safeguard. There is one basic temptation. The temptation is to retreat from Jesus to protect yourselves. As a countermeasure, Paul tells them to rejoice in the Lord. Rejoice in the pattern of life Jesus lived. Rejoice in the way God exalted him to the highest of all thrones over all the world. Rejoice even in the suffering that he had because the suffering you experience is a continuation of that. And don't just make a mental note of that. Rejoice! Get passionate about it!

Then the main attraction comes under critique. Look at v.2, "Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh! Clearly Paul is referring to certain people who are want them to become ethnically Jewish. Those who mutilate the flesh are those who circumcise. And in v.3, he reassures them by saying, "We are the circumcision [implied, the real circumcision] who worship in the

Spirit and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh.” That phrase “confidence in the flesh,” which Paul says three times, revolves around his ethnic identity. In v.4 – 6, Paul goes on to list seven aspects of his Jewish background. Then he says in v.8 that it is all rubbish.

Now before we go on, I have to acknowledge how difficult and sensitive this is to teach. It is **difficult** because today we are not tempted to become Jewish as the Philippian Christians might have been. The Jewish community is not in the same social place as it was then. And there is no true analogy today to first century Judaism. So how does this passage apply to us? We’ll see! It is **sensitive** to teach because we could get the wrong ideas about ethnicity. Is there anyone here who is of Jewish descent? If you are, this might sound disturbing. Is Paul saying that your ethnic identity doesn’t matter? And why does he use such strong language? “Dogs, evil workers, mutilaters.” Does Paul hate his own ethnic background? And, even if you aren’t Jewish in your background, should we understand this to mean that our ethnic heritage and background doesn’t matter? Should we all just be the same in Jesus?

You always need to take Paul’s letters in context. In Philippians 3, Paul is not saying that cultural differences are irrelevant and that we all should just be the same. In fact, he is saying the opposite. Gentile Christians don’t have to switch cultures; in some sense they should stay as they are. We are to accept certain cultural differences, and find unity in another way, a deeper way. He describes that way as “worship in the Spirit and boasting in Christ Jesus.”

So, Philippians 3 is not Paul’s internalized racism. He likes his Jewish heritage as one portion of the overall body of Christ. He circumcised Timothy in Acts 16, since he was half-Jewish, and Paul even protected other Jewish Christians in their observance of Jewish customs. So why does Paul use such strong language here? What Paul warns the Philippians against is a form of cultural imperialism from his own countrymen. So let’s look at his list:

#	Inherited things (COMMUNAL)	Achieved things (INDIVIDUAL)
1	circumcised on the eighth day (meaning he had good parents)	
2	a member of the people of Israel (he was one of the chosen people)	
3	of the tribe of Benjamin (he was of the right socio-political tribe, since the Benjamin remained loyal to the throne of David, and the Temple was in the lands of Judah and Benjamin)	
4	a Hebrew born of Hebrews (he was culturally Jewish and could speak Hebrew)	
5		as to the law, a Pharisee (he believed in resurrection of the faithful and in keeping the oral laws, unlike the Sadducees)
6		as to zeal, a persecutor of the church (he was activist against the unorthodox)
7		as to righteousness under the law, blameless (he did everything the Torah commanded, especially the external things)

Ever since Martin Luther, Protestants have taken the phrase “confidence in the flesh” specifically to mean “confidence in the things you can do yourself.” But clearly Paul is talking about more than that, because only the last 3 things are “things you can do yourself.” The first four things in Paul’s list are “things you inherit” from another community, especially your community of origin. So when Paul says, “confidence in the flesh” he means more than just what you can individually achieve. Back then, people did not view themselves primarily as individuals. They viewed themselves as a member of a community. Even when Paul says that he was a Pharisee and so on, he’s saying that as part of the larger community of Israel.

Now let’s suppose someone were to go overseas and say, “You not only have to accept Jesus, you also have to become a white American or live like one”? And is this so hypothetical? A lot of well-intentioned European and American missionaries did say things like this for a long time. What would Paul say to them? If we could transplant him into our setting, he would probably say, “My ancestors came on the Mayflower; my family has been in Boston since the 1600’s; I’m related to the Adams and Kennedy families, a blueblood of bluebloods; I graduated from Exeter and Harvard, have held various political offices, and have no criminal record. But I gave it all up for Jesus, to bring Jesus to others not like me!”

#	Inherited things (COMMUNAL)	Achieved things (INDIVIDUAL)
1	my ancestors came on the Mayflower	
2	my family has been in Boston since the 1600's	
3	I am related to the Adams and Kennedy families	
4	a blueblood of bluebloods	
5		graduated from Exeter and Harvard
6		have held various political offices
7		and have no criminal record

If my weird parallel has any truth to it, what would be Paul's point? That he's achieved a lot of things himself? Sure, there is some of that. But his main point would be that he is a white American who had given that up, in a sense, for Jesus. Specifically how? He ministers to people who were not of his background, without forcing them to adopt everything about his background.

Now let's back up and ask, "Why in the world would Gentiles want to get circumcised? Why would they want to become ethnically Jewish?" Because ethnic Israel claimed to be a righteous community, the community blessed by God. In many ways it was well regarded because the surrounding pagan culture had no ethics and was mired in despair existentially. It had a good reputation. So, a few Gentiles had already converted to Judaism, like those mentioned in Acts 2:10. Not only that, but Roman law back then recognized ethnic Israel as a legal category. If you were Jewish, you usually didn't have to bow down to the Emperor like all the other pagans. You had certain rights in court. You were given permission to meet in synagogues, and you were protected on the Sabbath. If Christians could be considered a part of Judaism in Roman law and society, then Christians would be more protected. They would have more of an audience. They would inherit some of the respect that people already had for Judaism.

On the other hand, if Christians became perceived as separate from Judaism as far as Roman law and society were concerned, then they would wander out into completely new territory. Christians would be much more vulnerable to persecution and even death. This has got to be the major issue behind this chapter, because Paul will soon say that Jesus is worth the persecution, even death. In v.10, he refers to knowing Christ "and the fellowship of his sufferings...becoming like him in his death." It is vital to remember: all that Christians needed to do to avoid the persecution was to get circumcised and say, "I'm Jewish!" At least, for the men. I suppose the single women could have just said, "I'm Jewish," and everyone would have just said, "Ok. I guess so." But for married women: For your families to avoid the persecution, all you had to do was convince your husbands to get circumcised. If you become Jewish, you're off the hook. Not only that, you'd get some natural respect to capitalize on! You'd have a platform on top of an already privileged and powerful community.

Does that happen today? Are there privileged and powerful communities that are attractive to you? Are you tempted to join them because you think it would enhance your witness? Because they have a kind of righteousness? Especially communities that have been traditionally defined by men? (As circumcision defined the Jewish community around men.) Always the temptation has been that you should go for Jesus AND join some other privileged community. Have Jesus AND join the wealthy. The Jewish community isn't in the same place today, but are there other communities nowadays that are privileged and protected and powerful that have been defined by something that is not Jesus and perpetuated?

After my freshman year of college, I went to be a Christian camp counselor at a week-long family camp. I was a counselor for rising seniors in high school, boys. This was through my home church, a Japanese American church, and a few sister churches on the West Coast. It was also one of my first experiences in ministry, so I was a little nervous. But the boys, who were wanna-be Asian gangsters, seemed to respect me. Even late at night when I would tell them to go to bed. Now it seemed to me like they respected me for fairly superficial, fleshly reasons, like the fact that at the time I drove a car that they liked, or that I had a cool jacket, or that I went to Stanford. They didn't really care much about my experience with Jesus. But at the time, I didn't mind, because it helped me get some sleep! I had the chance to meet up with some of them a couple weeks later at a post-conference rally. I talked with one of the boys. I asked him how it was going. He said fine. I asked how he was doing spiritually. He said, "Well, I'd like to be a good Christian,

but I don't think I can." I asked him why. He said, "Because I can't be a really good student." Deep in my gut, I wanted to say, "But you don't have to be a really good student to be a good Christian," but I didn't know how to say it at the time. On my way home, I felt like God helped me piece it together. He was saying, "I can't be a good Christian, because I can't be successful like you." I said back to God, "But I never said that." God seemed to say in reply, "You didn't have to. It's still in your heart. You value Jesus AND success equally, and here is a pivotal point – what do you really value?" I went home and cried. That was a real shock to me.

It might be a real shock to you. So often we think if we have Jesus AND are part of the successful group, we'll be better off. Don't get me wrong: It's good come to Jesus if you're powerful. It's good to come to Jesus if you're wealthy. It was good come to Jesus if you're Jewish. It is bad when Christians cannot let go of the privilege or power, even when ethnicity is closely tied into that, and instead protect it using theology.

The United States was founded on this Jesus AND problem, and my parallel earlier was not without purpose. The Puritans who first settled in New England were fleeing persecution. They crossed a wide body of water. They entered an abundant land. Who does that sound like? Israel. They recognized the poetry there, too. So they read themselves back into the earliest part of Israel's story: the exodus from Egypt, fleeing persecution, crossing a wide body of water, and entering an abundant land. And just like Israel pushing westward and wiping out the native Canaanites, for the most part, white American Protestants pushed westward and wiped out the native Americans. That was not from God. When we ask why racism has been an enduring problem in American history, we have to look back to the privilege and power that were protected using theology and linked to ethnicity. The real Christians in America during these early years were people like David Brainerd and Jonathan Edwards, who lived among the Native Americans, shared Jesus with them, and then tried to protect them from also having to live like the rest of white America when they preferred not to.

The application for you as students is to be mindful of your own cultural background and the things you implicitly value that you don't know you value. We have to be like Paul here. We have to be committed to Jesus as Lord of the world, and therefore committed to all people groups, and committed to transmitting the gospel, but not our culture. I think InterVarsity has the right foundation to build on.

#### **But You Do Have to Know the Jewish Messiah: v.7 – 14**

If all this is sounding hard to swallow, look at how Paul advises the Philippians in the second major section starting in v.7. "Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ." Paul has changed his mind about the value of his past experience in Judaism. He says "I regard it as loss because of Christ," meaning, it's not just neutral; it's negative. It took him away from Jesus for a good part of his life.

Now this raises all kinds of questions for us, doesn't it? For example, is it true that everything that is not Jesus leads you away from Jesus? Or is that only true of Judaism under certain circumstances? Well, Paul seems to answer that question in the next verse. He says in v.8, "More than that, I regard *everything* as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." Since he was also bicultural, educated in Greek and Roman customs, he throws that in the trash, too. This is bordering on the unbelievable. What does Paul mean?

Let me try to nuance this material, although this is not a sufficient answer. Clearly Paul valued the Hebrew Scriptures and his Jewish upbringing in many ways. But there was a particular way he learned those things that he had to unlearn. He says in Galatians 1 that he went into the wilderness of Arabia for 3 years by himself, presumably to unlearn everything and process it again with the mind of Christ. I think he would say that if he had learned Christ first, that he could have learned all this other stuff in a healthy way. Likewise, I think we inherit a lot of anger, greed, and arrogance by participating in our society. A good part of your spiritual growth is unlearning all the patterns and attitudes you've inhaled from the world around us. If there was some way that we could have learned Christ first, then we could handle all this other stuff in a healthy way and hold it loosely.

If we have not learned to hold it loosely, then we are too tied to our privilege and power, and we value it too much. **And if you think that Christians should hold on to privilege and power, then you essentially approve of cultural imperialism.** It's the same principle, just a different application.

The real question we've got to have, though, is: "Is it possible that the value of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord" could be so high, so important in value, that everything else you have, you would regard as a loss because it took you away from him? Let me tell you the story of a woman named Fanny. Fanny was born in 1820 to a proud, revolutionary period family. At six weeks old, she developed some eye problems, and her parents took her to a man who claimed to be a doctor. He mistreated her, and she went physically blind. But she would not be spiritually blind. By the age of 10 she had memorized the first four books of both Old and New Testaments. She enjoyed poetry, and an older woman named Mrs. Hawley spent hours with her teaching her poetry of all kinds as well as the Bible. But she was a normal schoolgirl at the New York School for the Blind. While there, she wrote this couplet: "I loathe, I abhor, it makes me sick / To hear the word Arithmetic." This girl grew up with a deep sense of confidence. During her lifetime, she wrote over 9,000 hymns for worship, including *Blessed Assurance; Praise Him, Praise Him; Redeemed, How I Love to Proclaim It; and To God Be the Glory*. She took only \$2 for each of her compositions, and chose to live simply. She traveled independently and preached at rescue missions whenever she arrived at a city. When you read her two autobiographies, you're struck with how joyful and how thankful she was. Even though she was blind, she was a woman of supreme focus. Here is what Fanny Crosby said about the meaning of her life: "Although it may have been a blunder on the physician's part, it was no mistake of God's. I verily believe it was His intention that I should live my days in physical darkness, so as to be better prepared to sing His praises and incite others to do so. I could not have written thousands of hymns...if I had been hindered by the distractions of seeing all the interesting and beautiful objects that would have been presented to my notice."

Isn't that amazing? Fanny Crosby would say, "Yes, knowing Christ is valuable, even more than my sight, even more than some other things I could have had." Paul seemed to think so, too. Look at the rest of v.8: "For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish [that's a polite translation; the word is actually human excrement]."

But why? Why is he so darn important? Because he is the embodiment of all Jewish hopes. Paul gives a reason in the last part of v.8 and v.9: "in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law [or to be precise, a righteousness of my own that comes from my ethnic group being given the law], but that [righteousness] which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith."

Paul is extending the Jewish hope of righteousness back to his fellow Jews, but only by locating it in Jesus. The Jews hoped and longed for righteousness. While we're at it, I should mention that the Jews hoped and longed for resurrection. That's why Paul refers to being resurrected in v.10 (the power of his resurrection), v.11 (the resurrection from the dead), implicitly in v.12-14, and explicitly again in v.21. Sometime near the year 586 BC, the Jews began to explicitly hope for resurrection as the outcome of being righteous. So the two are basically synonymous. If you are righteous, you would be resurrected, and vice versa. That idea comes mainly from Ezekiel. Just as it was "death" for Adam and Eve to be exiled from the garden land, so it was death for Israel to be exiled from the garden land by Babylon. So when God gave Ezekiel a vision of Israel being restored and made righteous again, it is a vision of resurrection in Ezekiel 37. Now because Jesus was the first to be resurrected, he is the embodiment of resurrection. And any Jew or Gentile like you or me can invite him to live in us and bring his resurrection inside us.

**Knowing Jesus:** For Paul, this must have made elegant sense, because in v.10 – 11, he gives his greatest statement in the whole letter: "I want to know Christ." Paul literally says, "I want to know the Anointed One." That is what the Greek word "christos" means: Anointed One. Because Kings were anointed with oil, it's a title that refers to Jesus being the Messiah, the King of Israel, and King of the world. And now, he says, I want to know this King who embodies all the Jewish hopes in himself.

My wife in many ways embodies my hopes. Back in 1998, I was in California, and a married couple asked me whether I wanted to meet a woman they knew named Ming. I asked them, "What is she like?" They

said, “She is passionate about God and the Bible; she’s been on IV staff for 6 years, but she also loves urban ministry; she loves kids; she’s interested in starting a school for disadvantaged kids; she’s interested in opening a Christian café.” And on and on. I thought, “Huh. She sounds like she embodies many of my hopes.” So they played matchmaker and when Ming flew out to CA for a conference, I got a chance to know her a little bit. Ming grew up at Stanford while her dad was a grad student, so we walked around Stanford’s campus for 5 hours on a Sunday afternoon, and it was pretty cool! I decided I wanted to get to know her some more! Two and a half months later, we started dating – long distance. Not easy. We would talk on the phone every so often, starting at night, but since she’s three hours ahead, she would always be more sleepy than me. So we switched to the mornings. I can’t wait until my kids are old enough to appreciate this: At least once a week, I got up at 4:30AM to get ready for my day and talk to Ming before her day started. And as the romantic would say, it seemed but an easy thing to do. We got married in May of 1999, and four years later, I’ve gotten to know how much she loves the Lord, how she loves our children, or how she loves me. I’ve gotten to know her. And, Lord willing, over the coming years, I’ll get to know and experience her more. As true as that is, though, I look forward even more to getting to know Jesus. I have known him now for 14 years, and I am still discovering more and more things about him. Knowledge of Jesus is never quite total, but it is real, and it is deep. **And just as I am glad to know my wife, even at the expense of not knowing other women in the same way, I am glad to know Jesus, even at the expense of not knowing a lot of other things.** If you don’t already, I hope each of you will feel the same one day.

**Power of his resurrection:** Now what about Jesus does Paul want us to know? Two things in v.10. The first is the power of his resurrection. I think this is really cool because people everywhere are crying out for empowerment. And that is exactly what Jesus gives: power. This is Jesus’ power to transform us as he embodies resurrection inside us by his Spirit. That’s to say, he is new life, and he plants himself within us to pour new life out through us, especially to demonstrate his love for all people.

**Sharing in his sufferings:** But that’s not all; the second thing Paul focuses us on is the “sharing of his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.” I don’t often think of the sufferings of Jesus. But Paul says here that he wants to share in those sufferings. The way Jesus died, as Paul says, “becoming like him in his death,” was simply being devoted to the Father, even at the expense of being rejected by his own people. Jesus wasn’t a success at the end of his life. He started off popular but his group whittled down to a few men and women. One friend betrayed him. The rest abandoned him in his hour of need.

Sharing in both the power of Jesus’ resurrection and his sufferings might look something like this. During my sophomore year of college, I was inspired to think about teaching at a public high school. My younger sister had become a Christian because of the ministry of one of her teachers, and after I had met this man, I felt a new sense of life stirring in me, moving me towards thinking about others. That was a new thought for a selfish kid like me. But my parents hated the idea, and that hurt. Resurrection power and sharing in his sufferings. One year after I graduated, I felt a stirring in my heart to live among Mexican immigrant families in an apartment complex that had major problems. I eventually lived there for 4 years. One day I met a middle aged Mexican woman who didn’t have a ride to work because the woman who usually gave her a ride was arrested. She worked twelve minutes away from me; I worked at Intel at the time. This woman wasn’t the easiest woman to relate to, if you know what I mean. But I felt the Lord say to me, “I can give you the power to keep caring for her.” I wound up giving her a ride to and from work every day for over a year. Near the end of that time, one day she turned to me in the car and asked me if I would be “el padrino,” the godfather, for her grandson. In Mexican culture, that is a high honor – it means caring spiritually for that child, and it also means that if something happens to the parents of that child, that I could be in charge. But my mom also disowned me for a while because she has fears and prejudices about Mexican people. She said to me, “Why don’t you stick to your own kind?” For 3 years now in Boston, Ming and I have lived in a three story house in a lower-income part of Boston; our household is currently 2 White, 3 Asian, 7 Black, and 1 Latina, not including kids. Our neighborhood happens to be Caribbean and African American and one of the neediest areas of Boston. There are two houses on our street that deal drugs. Again, we’ve all felt a lot of empowerment from Jesus to be there. This summer we’re turning our basement into a teen outreach center. But again, there is the suffering of Jesus, too. My parents are very opposed to this on all levels. The power of Jesus and the suffering of Jesus. They are bound together in knowing him.

Paul is quick to add that this doesn't make you perfect or proud; it makes you look forward in hope, sometimes desperately in hope! Why do you want to know this Jesus who embodies resurrection within you? So that, in v.11, one day you too will embody resurrection, soul and body. "And so, somehow, [through power God has yet to display] to attain to 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, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus." You might be asking, "What is he talking about?" What exactly is "the resurrection from the dead?" Hold on – Paul will explain himself in the next section.

### **You Inherit the Jewish Hope: v.15 – 21**

Finally in this last section, v.15 – 21, Paul tells the Philippians that because they belong to Christ, they inherit the Jewish hopes even though they are Gentiles – so hang on to them! In v.15 – 17, he instructs the Philippians again not to back down from Jesus. "Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind [the mind of Christ, according to 2:5]; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. Only let us hold fast to what we have attained. Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us."

Then he repeats his reason for giving this warning: the temptation to fold themselves back into ethnic Israel. Verse 18 – 19 read: "For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things." Their god is their belly not in the sense that they eat a lot, but they are obsessed with what they eat: kosher or not. Their glory is in their shame because they focus so much on circumcision and it is the wrong criteria to use. It is very sad that Protestant and Catholics alike have pragmatically and sometimes theologically given up on witnessing to the Jewish community. Yet how can this be? How can we let any group believe that there is salvation through their ethnicity, when Jesus is Lord of the world? The same is true to some degree of the black Nation of Islam. How can we let any group believe that there is salvation through their ethnicity when Jesus is Lord of the whole world?

That's a big contrast with the mindset of those who are in Jesus in v.20: "But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." Then almost as an afterthought, he adds in v.21 "He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself."

The greatest of all Jewish hopes, I think is mentioned in v.21. The idea of your soul being disembodied for eternity is Greek. It is not Jewish, and it is not Christian. The idea of resurrection is Jewish. It comes out of the conviction that death is a foreign enemy in the good creation God made. Therefore, if God is the God of the creation, He must also be the God of the resurrection. He will remake the creation as a world where heaven and earth are remade and reunited. This is where J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis get the idea that the more you are affected by evil, the more ghostly you become. When Frodo gets stabbed by the Nazgul blade, he starts to fade; he loses substance. On the other hand, the more good you are, the more substantial you become; you actually become more solid. Because we share in Jesus, we share in his resurrection spiritually, and we will share in his resurrection physically. Our bodies will be conformed to the body of his glory.

I'd like to share with you portions of a letter I received earlier this month. It's dated May 8th, 2003. It is written by a man who is still grieving the death of his wife, yet who still has a buoyant hope of meeting her again.

Dear friends,

I realize it sounds a bit presumptuous or kooky to suggest a "Godsighting". Here's what I mean by it: a Godsighting is an awareness of the movement of the Spirit of the Living God who resides in us [by faith in Jesus]. In particular, an awareness of His fondness for using ordinary folk like us to draw other ordinary folk we already know into an extraordinary relationship with Himself. Our need, therefore, is not to join another group or read another book on it, but to ask for eyes to see. Or, as Eugene Peterson has

said, “where most of us need help is not in working up a marketing plan for the supernatural yet to come [a Godsighting] but in acquiring an appreciation for the supernatural that is present and already far exceeds our capacity to take it in.”

For all you who have faithfully prayed and consistently touched the Harrisons’ lives, thank you. You have been Jesus to us. It has now been two years since the passing of my bride and partner, and your friend too. It hasn’t really gotten any easier, just more familiar. But, it hasn’t gotten any harder either, once the shock and disorientation dissipated. It just is what it is. I found myself blurting out loud in the car the other day, ‘I don’t like this, God!’

Yet, there are many Godsightings in grief. And unexpected gifts. You almost have a new lucidity about your life, a clarity of what is purposeful and what is purposeless. This is an immense gift. And I’m grateful for it, for there’s a strange peace I now have. I hurry less. I do fewer urgent things and more important things. And I stress less about small stuff, and medium stuff too. And, now that we’re on the subject, most large things too. And I have unflagging hope for heaven. The kind of hope you can feel and taste, not pie in the sky.

The boys and I are stabilizing and growing – oh so slowly — in confidence in our new life and in the goodness of God. I am eternally grateful for your prayers on our behalf, and the community we live in here locally. And Mother’s Day approaches and gives pause. Gavin put on a pair of Anne’s earrings yesterday. And we sometimes spray her perfume in the air and celebrate a momentary remembrance. And I remember her face as I read about a woman in Wallace Stegner’s book *Crossing to Safety*, “that incredible, gleaming, ardent smile, a transfiguration, a bursting to the surface of pure delight, uncomplicated love.” I miss that. But I know I will see it again, on another day.

Wendell Berry has written about that day:

There is a day  
when the road neither  
comes nor goes, and the way  
is not a way but a place.

That is the Christian hope of the resurrection. In spite of the pain this man has, he looks forward to joy upon joy. And so it is with us. We are not uncertain about the future. Nor do we do look forward to an ethereal existence. Though we are Gentiles, through Jesus we inherit the Jewish hope that we will be more substantial than we are now. Here’s what we look forward to: a touch upon the face, a finger to wipe our tears, arms to embrace us in what will be at last, a welcome home.

There is a day  
when the road neither  
comes nor goes, and the way  
is not a way but a place.