

**EASTSIDE COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH**

**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2021**

**SERMON: "Beware the dogs..."**

**TEXT: PHILIPPIANS 3:2-11**

*Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,  
Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave;  
Weep o'er the erring one, lift up the fallen,  
Tell them of Jesus, the mighty to save.*

• *Refrain:*

*Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,  
Jesus is merciful, Jesus will save.*

That is one of the well-known hymns of blind songstress, Fanny J. Crosby. Fanny Crosby was born in 1820 in Brewster, New York and rose to be one of the most influential hymn writer, poet, social justice advocates, and missionary of her day. She wrote over 9000 hymns including Blessed Assurance, Pass Me Not, and To God Be the Glory. She has been dubbed the "Queen of Gospel Song Writers" and the "Mother of modern congregational singing in America." In 1975 she was inducted into the Gospel Music Hall of Fame. It is said that over 100 million copies of her hymns have been printed. She even wrote under 200 pseudonyms because hymnal publishers were hesitant to have too many songs from one writer in a single hymnal. She had a desire to see her hymns win 1 million people for Jesus, and prayed over each piece that she wrote to that end.

Fanny not only wrote Christian pieces, she was also a well-known poet, and wrote many political and patriotic secular works especially during the American Civil war.

She was at ease in the presence of presidents, princes, and paupers. By the age of 60 she had decided to focus her attention on the poor and downtrodden of New York City. Even though she could live very

comfortably, she gave much of what she had away, choosing to live a very simple life in the area that she was ministering. She chose to recognize herself not as a celebrity (which she was) but as a mission worker.

Her hymns have been criticized as being theologically shallow, crudely sentimental, and gushy but in the words of George C. Stebbins, a contemporary hymn writer of Fanny's who wrote the beloved hymns "Take Time to be Holy," and "Have Thine Own Way, Lord," Stebbins said, "There was probably no writer in her day who appealed more to the valid experience of the Christian life or who expressed more sympathetically the deep longings of the human heart than Fanny Crosby."

Fanny longed to see people come to know Jesus as Lord and Saviour, and devoted her life, her talents, and her celebrity to that end. Her hymns are still sung today and move people closer to Jesus.

Today, as we continue in Philippians, we see Paul's own humble example of one who put aside his own notoriety, education, and comfort so that the Gospel message would go forward.

Join me in our scripture reading today – Philippians 3:2-11:

**<sup>2</sup> Watch out for those dogs, those people who do evil, those mutilators who say you must be circumcised to be saved. <sup>3</sup> For we who worship by the Spirit of God are the ones who are truly circumcised. We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort, <sup>4</sup> though I could have confidence in my own effort if anyone could. Indeed, if others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more!**

**<sup>5</sup> I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew**

**if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. <sup>6</sup> I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault.**

**<sup>7</sup> I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. <sup>8</sup> Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith. <sup>10</sup> I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, <sup>11</sup> so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!**

What do you allow to come between you and Jesus? This is what Paul is all about in this section. "Beware the dogs" is Paul's battle cry. Anything or anyone that takes your attention away is dangerous!

## A PERSONAL EXAMPLE

Saul of Tarsus! He was a Rockstar in the ancient Jewish world. He was a prime example of an individual who dedicated himself to "God" but missed the boat completely.

Saul had impeccable qualifications. Orthodox parents, followed the letter of the law better than 99% of others. Not only was he an "Israelite" by race but he was a direct, blood descendant of Benjamin. The tribe of Benjamin prided itself of being true to the house of David. It was the tribe that the first King came from (and possibly why his parents named him 'Saul').

What defined Saul above all others was that he was a “Hebrew of the Hebrews.” You need to do a bit of research to see why this is significant. During the Roman occupation of Israel, many Jews fled their country and took up residence throughout what was known as Asia Minor. Tens of thousands fled to Rome. Alexandria had more than a million Jews. At the beginning, many Jewish people fought hard to retain their customs, laws, and beliefs. Sadly, while fighting for their culture, many lost the ability to speak and read Hebrew. As time went on, the Jewish people adopted the language of the region they were living in. Saul was born in Tarsus which was in what we know as Turkey. It was a gentile city. Even though he was born and raised in a gentile city, he was taught to speak and read Hebrew and did not lose the language of his religious culture. So a “Hebrew of the Hebrews” was not just a Jewish person, but a Jewish person who knew the language.

If anyone could boast about their occupation it was Saul of Tarsus. He took his devotion to the letter of the law very seriously. He was devout to the point of being a fanatic. He was trained as a Pharisee under the best scholars and put his knowledge to use when he persecuted this new, upstart religion that followed Jesus. Paul was a defender of the faith. You must remember that to keep to the letter of the law zealously put you in right standing with God. Remember many of the people who would come to Jesus and start with “I have kept all the laws and commandments!” It is what we call a “works” salvation that procured a place with God in the afterlife.

Saul had it all...except a relationship with Jesus! We know the story in Acts 9 how Jesus confronts Saul, and Saul’s life is changed forever. What Saul of Tarsus held as important, noble, and profitable, Paul, the follower of Jesus, has a change of priorities and counts it as “loss.” Having an encounter with the living Lord, Jesus, the Christ must change your priorities and perspectives.

I know I say it a lot...but it is worthy of repeating every moment of every day. The fact is that our efforts, pedigree, and ability to keep rule and regulations does not bring us closer to God. This is a fact that has been established over and over in scripture and we, in the modern church, have a bad habit of forgetting this point.

The righteousness of God is conferred on us by God in response to our faith in Jesus Christ! If this is the case, then why do we corporately (as the Church) or individually (as believers) keep falling back on the idea that "doing" things (as good as they might be) will lead to us being righteous?

We forget that doing good things does not make the Spirit dwell in us, rather the Spirit dwells in us and a result is doing good things! In Evangelism Explosion, we learn the answer to the question "Why should we do good works?" It is not that the good works is to gain a gift from God, but rather we do good works as a way of saying "Thank You" to God for the gift that he bestowed upon us.

## TO KNOW CHRIST!

The most important thing to Paul is that he knows Christ! What does that mean for us today?

Verse 10 teaches answer the question for us:

**<sup>10</sup> I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death,**

First we should know the "power of Jesus' resurrection." Paul isn't talking about a distant experience after we die. Paul says to know it 'NOW' in the present. This is the very real experience that we go through when we first begin a relationship with Jesus. When we repent of our sins and put our

trust and faith in Jesus, we are united with Christ. This is the reality of what is portrayed when we are baptized. We repent, we go under the water symbolic of "dying with Christ" and we are raised out of the water joined in the resurrection. We are joined with Jesus and our lives should be changed forever. The zealous, righteous Saul of Tarsus becomes Paul, the servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. We cease identifying and practicing the old ways of sin and the world and we begin, joined with Jesus seeking to be obedient in all we do. Some would have you believe that it doesn't matter if Jesus died and rose again...but Paul tells us a different reality. If Jesus did not suffer, die, and rise again...there is no point in knowing Him. But when we do accept what Jesus did on our behalf and realize that He is alive, then our lives must change and this knowledge shapes every step we take from this point on.

A second aspect of knowing Christ is sharing in His suffering. It is a hard concept to understand especially in the perverted twisted teachings that have arisen that tell us a life with Jesus means prosperity, health, and riches. There is absolutely no biblical basis, but this false teaching but it keeps multiplying. Why? Honestly, who wants to know that they are going to suffer and struggle? Paul knew struggle and he knew suffering. As you read his New Testament letters, there is example after example of Paul's personal suffering for the Gospel. Often Paul wrote that he experienced such lows he thought he was going to die!

The reality is that our struggles and pain draw us closer to Jesus. It is in those times of need that rely on Jesus alone. Not only do we draw closer to Jesus, but if we are willing, our struggles and our painful experiences allow us to minister to others more effectively.

Several years after my wife and I were married, we experienced the joyful news that we were expecting our first child. Just under 12 weeks into the pregnancy we sadly experienced the loss brought by a miscarriage. It was

painful, it was hard and all we could do was take comfort in our knowledge that our unborn child was with Jesus. What did come from that experience was the ability to understand and minister to those who had lost children. Suddenly we were aware of how many couples had experienced that type of loss and now we could minister the love and grace of Jesus to those around us.

We serve a Lord that chose the way of a suffering servant. As Paul has already established, Jesus gave up everything so that we could have our sins forgiven. We have a long history of witnesses, who have chosen to do without, who have chosen to put themselves in harms way, so that Jesus could be introduced to a world that needs Him. Paul was looking at a death sentence in prison as he writes this letter. The Philippian believers are suffering persecution for believing in Jesus. Paul's message still rings out that we are to "Rejoice in the Lord!" It is a theme of Paul's as he reminds us what is important in Romans 8:18:

**<sup>18</sup> Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later.**

Are you willing to "beware of the dogs" that try to stop you from "knowing" Jesus?

Let's pray...