

Series: "Valuable Wisdom for a Church on the 'Move'"

Sermon: "Confidence"

Text: Philippians 3:1-11

RGGJR/FBCCS/10-25-20 **UNEDITED**

- The beloved Bible Story of Gideon and his 300 men has a theological point to make. As God begins the process of whittling down the army of 32,000 Israelites to a mere 300 with trumpets, lamps and swords, the LORD makes this theological point clear. The book of *Judges* 7:2 reads: **"The LORD said to Gideon, 'You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her...'"**—then God reduced the number men, in ways that make the story fun to tell, down to just the 300. The 300 then went into battle with a unique battle plan from God likely out-numbered by, at the very least, 10 to 1.
- Israel's victory over the Midianites is absolute and clearly from God. The message is God's people should place their confidence in the LORD rather than their own power, plans and rather than even conventional wisdom—in this case, for fighting military battles.
- The story and theology are not over with this victory even though teachers often stop there in vegetable DVD's and Sunday School lessons.
- Chapter 8 of *Judges* begins with one tribe of Israel, the Ephraimites, expressing their displeasure to Gideon that he had not allowed them to participate in this glorious victory over the Midianites. You can look at that later but one thing their response tells me is that God's people often like the *personal* significance they find in being part of what seem to be successful missions on God's behalf. God's people are not always satisfied that God gets all the glory when other believers seem to be getting some glory for participating.
- The desire for gaining *personal significance* through what seem to be successful missions of God is connected with what I am focusing on in *Philippians* 3 this morning. However, the straightforward theology

is: Believers are to place their confidence in God rather than themselves for life and mission.

- Take another example from King David in *2 Samuel*. In chapter 18 of *2 Samuel*, that's the record of King David sadly having to fight against his own son Absalom whose beautiful, pride-inducing long hair gets him caught in a low hanging tree branch and leads to his capture and death.
- In this story of battle, as a matter of strategy, David divided the armies sent out to fight into thirds and then into units of hundreds and finally fighting groups tens. There was counting for the sake of wise battle strategy and the Bible makes no suggestion this was a wrong thing to do.
- But, a few chapters further, in *2 Samuel* 24, you have the different story of counting soldiers. At this point in time, Israel and the LORD are not getting along well. The text says, "**The LORD's anger was burning against them.**" That doesn't sound like a good thing to me.
- In this disrupted relational state with God, King David decided he would count his troops. This is not for a battle strategy as it was earlier. This is for strengthening his own *confidence* in his armies. Since they were HIS armies, this is a matter of strengthening *self-confidence* in Israel to fight.
- I suspect, as it often is with kings, rulers, and other people in power who are not walking very closely with God, that it was motivated by a need for building and maintaining a sense of personal significance. If David wasn't feeling much *personal significance* from serving the "hotly angry LORD" on HIS mission, David would find a human way to build his own significance.
- None of this is new. The rubric for humans seeking their own personal significance rather than glorifying God's true significance is

a major theme in *Genesis*. The question back there was who gets the "NAME!" Humans even tried to build a tower to the heavens in Babylon to raise their personal significance without God. This was, by the way not by any means the last human tower built for personal significance!

- Subsequent significance-seeking towers may not all look like we picture Babylonian Ziggurats. In fact, most are not even built from material, visible bricks and pitch for mortar.
- AND, it is critical to note, according to the Apostle Paul in today's passage that personal significance-seeking towers are sometimes being built in Jesus' church.
- To continue with a metaphor I have been using that has been mysterious to some of you, many personal significance-seeking towers are built in churches by neatly stacking into piles the church "bricks" of what we are used to as church and what makes people happy because they are comfortable with church.
- Joab, King David's general, could see through David's personal significance building in his counting of the warriors. Joab was no great theologian or morality expert—but, he reminded the king that he could let the LORD multiply his troops 100 times over if necessary. In other words, put your confidence in what God can do when God wants to do it not in your own abilities, resources, strategies and definition of metrics that matter to you, O, King David!
- David awoke to his sin of self-confidence building—of trusting in himself in this act and repented. The LORD still punished David and the people of Israel. David had a choice: 3 years of famine, 3 months of fleeing enemies or 3 days of deadly plague. He chose the quicker

is better 3 days and 70,000 people died for his personal tower-building among God's people. A significant matter? You bet it is!!

- David prayed. The plague ceased at the location of the mountain top threshing site owned by a Jebusite named Arunah. Knowing who deserved confidence and significance, King David decided to build an altar to worship the LORD at that very spot. He wanted to buy the threshing floor. Arunah, knowing this was going to be a sacrifice to the LORD wanted to give it as a gift.
- This is where that famous verse of *2 Samuel 24:24* comes in. David replies: ***I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.*** In other words, I won't act like I am making a sacrifice that makes me look significant in my worship and mission if I am not really the one making the sacrifice.
- The king wins the argument. He buys the land. He makes the true sacrifice in money—not just an appearance for human-significance-sake. He offers a big, expensive burnt offering. Later, this very land becomes the land upon which Solomon builds the Temple of the LORD God of Israel.
- Does that sound significant? It is! It is a big lesson for God's people throughout the ages. Your confidence is to be in the LORD God not in any of your own abilities, strategies, plans, programs, or metrics of success.
- Why? Because if your confidence is in these, you will be likely to become entrapped in that age-old, from the beginning, human propensity to build your won significance apart from God. You will be a human-significance tower builder.
- For God's, people then and now, the LORD God is the one who is truly significant and thus deserves the worship, the sacrifice, the obedience on mission, the altars, the Temple and so on.

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- How much of what I ostensibly do for God and call "church" or "mission" may, in fact, be me seeking personal significance at the low price in our day of looking spiritual? I say "low price in our day" because we can very often make church "bricks" comfortably, safely and without much personal sacrifice at all. We can let Arunah do the paying and, like the Ephraimites in Gideon's day, just expect to be included in the glory of God's victory giving us a sense of personal significance.
- One other point I wish to make before reading the relatively easy-to-understand text in *Philippians* 3:1-11 this morning. The water in which we all swim—the water in which some of our kids go to school from age 4 ½ until they are in their 20's is a water that believes and teaches with all its heart that "**self**-confidence" (apart from God) is a good thing—a very good thing!
- I am not rejecting *confidence*. The Bible teaches we can have confidence and courage if we are trusting God I am rejecting what sometimes is called "*self-esteem*" as a true source for confidence.
- "Self-esteem"—self-confidence by this name—has been around explicitly in our culture for about 50 years. Some claim the name and the idea as a movement started with a book published in 1969 by a psychologist named Nathaniel Brandon. Brandon claimed that most mental or emotional problems people face were due to "low self-esteem." He taught, and this permeated business, education, politics and religion in our culture, that improving an individual's self-esteem would improve their performance and cure pathologies.
- This was all without God. We were to consider ourselves to be innately important—often more important than the well-being and the feelings of others. More important than any bigger collective importance of any group of people. We mattered most! We were so

important, we could trust ourselves—we could place confidence in our own abilities, plans, powers, metrics and so on.

- You can see the results of this in politicians who are so self-important they justify having power by any means—rich young people whose feelings and ideas are so self-important, they can destroy your property at will because you don't matter. You see it in silly ways by contests staged as if there are never any winners or losers—all that matters is you were here and you are so stinking important the world revolves around the fact you deigned to even participate. So, here is your participant trophy because you are so important you should never lose.
- Some of this cultural I-am-like-God—maybe I am God complex is in all of us because we are in the flesh. More has seeped into us by swimming in our cultural water. Some of our kids have breathed it in so deeply they can't imagine they are not the center of the universe.
- This is in the church. This was in the church or at least trying to get into the church in Philippi. Let's look at *Philippians 3:1-11*
- **READ Philippians 3:1-11**
- Let me lightly touch on a couple of things to avoid confusion. "Finally", in verse 1 is not a preacher's trick to make you feel like he is done when he isn't. It could also mean something like "and as for the rest of what I have to say..."
- Much more importantly the conditionality in verse 11 "**and so, somehow to attain to the resurrection from the dead**" is not the Apostle Paul wondering if he will indeed make it to heaven someday if he just works hard enough to be saved from hell.
- Here's the short explanation from the context. In verse 1-10, he has just argued that nothing he is or could do on his own is worth anything. He is not turning 180 degrees here to argue the opposite.

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- The word translated "*resurrection*" in the NIV is a bit different from the word Paul uses for the resurrection connected with what often too loosely call "salvation" or some think of as "going to heaven when we die." The word is a compound that adds the idea of "out" to make it the "out resurrection." The idea is that Paul wants to be part of the "*out resurrection from among the dead*" and this is not how he normally refers to the resurrection connected with living eternally in new bodies with Christ.
- What is he talking about? Some conclude this being brought out from among the dead is a reference to being separated out for eternal rewards from those believers who were too **dead** in their living for Christ to receive these rewards.
- This can make sense when it is explained better than I have but, I take a different view because of what Paul said in chapter 2 about humble servants sacrificing together for the mission of God as the church of Philippi—these humble servants shining like bright stars in the dark sky. They would stick out if you will.
- So, here Paul is referring to believers and churches who will choose to make the sacrifice of humility like Jesus did. When they do, they will be out-resurrected—they will be brought out to stick out like shining stars from the world that doesn't trust God and from even other believers who say, "*No! Just give me comfort and certainty on the mission and I will do whatever it takes to keep those for myself.*"
- The point is Paul isn't worried about his eternal security. He is aware that even he may not have the courage to choose to trust God and sacrifice for the mission when times get really tough.
- So if I were a sinner and watched TV programs like "The Walking Dead," Paul is saying he hopes he will make the sacrifices that will allow God to pull him out of the teeming masses of "walking dead

zombies and Christians who are still living among the walking dead as if they were only walking dead zombies and not alive in Christ. (Hey! That could be a good plot twist for a TV show).

- Paul calls on the Philippians in 3:1 to continue to rejoice—of course—in the LORD!" Some see these commands to rejoice and conclude the letter is about always being joyful as a Christian.
- That is true as far as it goes. However, the letter is about **always** being joyful as Christin humbly sacrificing by putting the good of others first for the sake of God's mission through Jesus' church no matter what it may cost you in this life.
- I suggest Christians trying to figure out ways to be joyful in life apart from being on God's mission in Jesus' church is an impossible quest. We were made for this mission. We were born again and left to live for this mission. True joy will only be found through us knowing our real purpose on this mission.
- Paul tells them not to worry—and, I suspect, more so not to feel bad or denigrated or yelled at that he is going to say something very strongly that he has already told them before. In other words, by bring this up he is not saying they are a bad church, bad believers or bad people. However, what is at stake for the mission of God makes it imperative that he remind them of this.
- There are "dogs" coming to the Philippian church. Not one of the Roots' dogs but human dogs. That's the harsh, condemning, devaluing name he calls itinerant teachers who teach Christians to put confidence in human flesh—to put confidence in themselves to live the Christian life of the mission he is addressing in the letter.
- "Mutilators of the flesh" seems to me to clearly refer to the legalistic teachers who followed Paul into the Gentle churches he helped start or teach and told the Gentiles if they really wanted to serve God they

would have to become Jews—not just disciples of Jesus Christ. They are sometimes called the "Judaizers."

- The Judaizers were teaching Gentile Christians that they needed to put confidence in their flesh to live for God—have self-confidence—by doing something they could do to their physical body.
- Paul reminded the Philippians that God's mission wasn't about the number of troops. Whether Gideon's 300 would be enough or David's 1.3 million soldiers could keep him safe without God.
- Confidence needed for the mission was confidence in the heart by the Spirit. What needed to be cut away was nothing of the flesh but rather something of the heart. What need to be removed was any confidence that the mission was up to them—their plans, their smarts, their powers, their human ways of defining and measuring success.
- *Look, says Paul, if anyone should have confidence in the flesh through the Jewish means these guys are teaching, I should!* He then lists all his human credentials—all the things that might have given him self-esteem—might have made him feel significant by the **metrics** of the Judaizers. Paul was far more Jewish than simply having been circumcised made him.
- You may keep hearing me use this word "**metrics**." These are the measures—the standards we set by which we measure success. Metrics are tricky little things when it comes to God's mission.
- For example, for King David the metric of a good army that could win battles was big numbers of soldiers that could be counted by humans. That metric was probably also in the minds of Gideon and his men. But, that common sense human metric that humans can see measure and expect to work was not God's metric at all.

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- God was doing something else that humans couldn't do unless they trusted Him in frightening ways if they were still relying on human metrics. God was doing something only he could do so he alone would get the name—the glory—the significance—as he deserved.
- When we humans set the metrics for success in life and even in the church or on mission, it is funny how often those metrics reflect things we can do and things that if we do them might make a name for us and fill us with significance over our success in God's work.
- We will need to think deeply and pray frequently about this matter of metrics as a church in the days ahead. How will we measure the success of FBC? Do we need to do that measuring or is that measuring something about my need for significance?
- All that Paul would have used as metrics of significance, success, spirituality and such in the past—all the things that he could see and measure as a human who can't see all God sees—all of these seem to have the same worth as "**SKUBALA**" to him now.
- If you have been here for a while, you know that "skubala" is a favorite word of mine because it can mean anything from waste that is trash or garbage to dung itself.
- How strongly does Paul feel about the destruction of the church by human self-confidence that is based on human metrics and human-possible evaluation for the sake of feeling human self-significance? So strongly, he has called those who spread these ideas "dogs"—nearly a curse word and called the things by which they measure probably "dung" at least "garbage." Can you feel it?
- Does this mean Paul has no aspirations? No. We already saw in verse 11 that he was hoping to aspire to be out-resurrected from those who were dead or lived as if they were dead even as believers.

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- Will he reach these aspirations by human means and will they be measured by human metrics of success. No! Will they be about his own significance because of his own abilities and powers? Never!
- Instead, Paul aspires to *know Jesus Christ more and more intimately in fellowship with him—in partnership with Christ on the mission.*
- Instead, Paul desires always to be found walking around—living life *on the mission in Christ by faith not by being a really good performer—a great keeper of the rules so people can look at him and measure him as a personal success—a significant man!*
- Instead, he wants so to so Christ that it is the resurrection power of Christ that does what Paul does on the mission not anything he can do on his own.
- BUT, PLEASE get this part...Paul knows this resurrection power of Christ working in him instead of his own power for the mission will not produce personal significance. It will not build a tower or even a church to honor the great Paul.
- Instead, it will bring sharing in—partnership —koinonia with the very painful, sacrificial sufferings of Christ that took him all the way to death on the cross.
- By human metrics, dying on a cross, as a vile criminal would, is not a way to build *self-esteem*. It is not a way to increase one's *self-confidence* to figure out life or even to figure out with certainty the steps in God's redemptive mission. Remember he said, "*Father if possible let this cup pass from me...*"
- Do we want to shine as stars in the blackness of a Godless culture and sometimes a human focused church world? Would we like to be "out-resurrected" from being hidden in the masses without God and the masses of believers living by their own power, abilities, plans, and metrics?

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- Then, we will need to give up our self-confidence in our own plans and abilities to be right as a church based upon the common sense metrics that most Christians in our culture hold as success for a church. Just making churchy-bricks and stacking them into a nice start of a nice tower won't be the way to do this.
- AND, we will need to call some things people think are the very obvious humanly countable metrics of even being a "church" at all and what to others are obvious measures of church success—we will need to call things that others say are *important*—SKUBALA.
- BTW says Paul, this is why they nailed Jesus Christ to a cross.
- Counting his own personal significance as before others as dung, and instead knowing Jesus and his significance more and more so that he was trusting God—so that he lived more and more by **God-confidence** instead of self-confidence, Paul believed the sacrifice was worth it for the mission and maybe even the reward.
- Point In fact: the way of the humble sacrifice of the cross **IS** success on the mission—here in *Philippians 3*, **it IS the metric** for Paul and this church!
- This is true even though the *walking dead*, made up of unbelievers and believers alike hidden and walking around among them—even though many others will never see and acknowledge this particular metric in a way that gives us any *personal* significance.
- This takes great pressure off always having to know with certainty as a person or a church, always to know the most, always being right and even always needing to win—those are the SKUBALA of self-confidence and personal significance as well.