

Message Series: **'Fulfilled: experiencing joy in unexpected places'**

Message Title: **'Safeguarding Your Soul'**

Scripture Source: **Philippians 3:1-11**

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You and Your Soul

His words and questions 'cut to the quick' at times, leaving us pondering, wondering, and uncertain of what to do with his firm and direct assertions.

"What good will it be for man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?

Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?" Matthew 16:26.

How would you answer? The implication is that to 'lose our soul' is a tragic and irreversible thing. The Bible teaches that our soul lives on beyond our earthly journey. 2 Corinthians 5:6-10. It is not a loss of existence. It is the loss of experiencing eternity with God in a new heaven and new earth. It is to be separated from God and his love, grace, and goodness for eternity because of a rejection of the grace and forgiveness of God offered through a relationship with Jesus.

Jesus yearns for the reality of a healthy soul for you and me. Listen to these words of invitation and instruction. Matthew 11:28-29 *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."*

Our souls matter to Jesus. Yours matters greatly...regardless of how beat up you are, confused, uncertain or weary. Let's mull over that word 'soul'. "the immaterial part of a person...the principle of life, feeling, thought, and action in humans...spiritual part of humans that is believed to survive death and be subject to happiness or misery."

So, it makes sense that Paul, an ardent follower of Jesus is instructive and passionately so about 'safeguarding our souls' in Philippians 3:1-11.

How Safe is Your Soul?

This question implies that 'threats' to our souls is a daily reality. For you, and for me. In this passage Paul addresses the 'how' of a 'safeguarded soul.' He knew that there are serious and ever present dangers to our souls...here are at least three dangers to a healthy soul.

- Disappointments
- Deceptions
- Distractions

Paul skilfully and practically instructs us on 'how to' safeguard and protect our souls. As we work through this down to earth, deeply personal, and instructive passage, ask yourself this question,

'Which 'D' word do I currently need to pay attention to? Disappointments, deceptions or distractions?' All of the words matter, but often one stands out. We feel it, we sense it. Which one is it for you?

Safeguarding our Soul...how?

Paul is proactive in the care and protection of his soul. 'Safeguard' is defined as: "something that serves as a protection or defence or that ensures safety...To shield or defend against danger, damage, or injury."

Folks, people can encourage and support you, but you and I must take full responsibility for protecting our souls from a wide range of threats that can arise at any time and target us.

Threat # 1: Disappointments...and how to safeguard your soul

Philippians 3:1: Paul has suffered in a variety of ways as a servant of Jesus. Check out 2 Corinthians 11:23-29. Yet, he chooses to find joy in Christ...his character, his friendship and his mission. Remember, joy is not a circumstance; it is both a choice and consequence.

Paul radiates experiencing joy in unexpected places, even when disappointments have shadowed his steps at times. Disappointments can sour us, put us off God. That is where some of us are today. Paul advocates for honesty about the hard times yet chooses to find joy and hope in God.

What about you? Is your soul losing hope because of a stinging disappointment or a string of them? Disappointments come in all sizes and shapes...relational, physical, emotional, financial...can you be honest and accurate about a disappointment that is a threat to a healthy soul? Illustrate...

Threat # 2 Deceptions...and how to safeguard your soul

Philippians 3:2-9: Paul's protective instincts for the church family he cares deeply about kick into high gear because of the invasive and destructive presence of false teachers and deceptive and misleading teachings. The man is merciless with those who knowingly 'mess' with the message of Jesus. And then, after he deals with them, he speaks vulnerably about his own misguided journey and how everything changed for him.

Back to verses 2-3. Wow, three stinging descriptors: 'dogs, evildoers, and mutilators of the flesh'. In his mind's eye he sees packs of scavenger dogs, prowling the streets, looking for food and victims. These dogs were often diseased and aggressive. Not your picture of a well trained pet at home that wags its tail when you walk through the front door. Not at all. Paul sees individuals trying to persuade people that faith in Jesus is not enough. This particular camp of teachers demanded that certain Old Testament Jewish 'rites' were practiced, specifically, circumcision. This ancient practice was a tangible evidence of a Jewish man in a relationship with God. Quote:

Deceptive teaching can 'mess' with people's souls. It happens all the time. People are confused and uncertain of what to believe, often resorting to cobbling together a 'faith perspective' that feels right for them. Jesus may get some 'air time' but not in a singular way. Quote: Tom Brady

"I think we are into everything...I don't know what I believe. I think there is a belief system, I'm just not sure what it is." (New York Times article)

For some of us in the room, we can echo Brady's words. Uncertainty about core beliefs can be unhealthy. I am not talking about blind faith or dogmatic and unthinking beliefs. I am talking about cultivating an intelligent faith based upon sound teaching that is rooted in the unique person of Jesus Christ. Folks, there is no shortage of religious/philosophical teachers that promote an outlook that is self-centered and marginalises the need for the grace of God and a Saviour. Jesus pointedly stated that He is the source of spiritual life and enlightenment. John 8:12, 14:6.

Let me ask you...if you are committed to a self-help outlook on life, how is that turning out for you...and your soul?

How can we safeguard our soul against deceptive teaching and teachers? By asking critical questions such as: am I being taught that self-improvement and good deeds are the way to experience deep happiness and the path to God? Is this religious path marginalizing Jesus Christ, his sacrificial death, and triumphant resurrection? If it is, I warn you about this profound threat to your soul.

Ask questions and search the Scriptures for answers and direction. For example, 1 John 4:1-6 Read carefully. Jesus is the 'lighting rod' issue. Never veer from that fact. Many deceptions and deceivers can appear very attractive and compelling. Be on your guard, especially in the celebrity crazed culture we live in. "Test the spirits...how is Jesus portrayed and taught? Is his salvation mission profiled or marginalized?"

In verses 4-9 Paul speaks of his dramatic journey from a 'works-oriented' perspective to a Christ-only viewpoint. From a human point of view he had everything working for him. His religious heritage, his ethics, religious performance, passion and focus...if being a good and religious person assured a healthy and secure soul, this man achieved in spades. Illustrate: Swindoll quotes

Yet, he decisively rejected all of his own achievements and heritage so that his soul could experience the grace of God that comes only through a relationship with Jesus. Vss. 7-9 This is amazing and disruptive grace at its finest. Paul is no longer misled in his thinking. He comes to experience the truth that is Jesus, the Son of God, Saviour of the world...Saviour and Lord of Paul. With language that is shocking he dismisses his achievements for a deeply personal relationship with Jesus of Nazareth. It is like he is saying, 'before Jesus I was feeding my soul the worst of 'junk food' in

terms of foundation for a relationship with God.' Please, he is not saying that heritage, family etc is bad; what he is saying it is useless for spiritual connection with God.

So, be committed to getting to know the truth of the Christian faith. Study and learn with others. Explore a journey group, ask questions of us one on one. Read/watch solid Christ-centered, Bible based material. "Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." 2 Peter 3:18

Threat # 3 Distractions: Philippians 3:10-11

It is so easy to be pulled away from exploring the faith or following Jesus...lots of distractions out there...and few are bad! Yet, even the ordinary 'stuff' of life can become a distraction that marginalizes the cultivating of a relationship with Jesus. Paul was resolved that wouldn't happen to him. That's not a proud boast; it is a humble resolve...to experience the reality of Jesus more and more fully in his here and now life. "To know Jesus and his power" More on this next week as we talk about experiencing his presence and power today requires that we put the past in its place, as hard as that can be.

What are some safeguards against the threat of recurring distractions?

First of all, 'mark your moment' of choosing to follow Jesus with believers baptism. Go on record publicly that you trust in Christ for forgiveness of sins and are wanting to grow as a passionate follower of Jesus. Go public. Illustrate: Bonnie Powell Next service of celebration, Easter Sunday, April 5th. Questions? Let's start the conversation for 10-15 minutes after this morning's service. This could be the 'start' you need.

Secondly, find a few fellow Christians and spiritual seekers that you can hang around and talk about matters of life and faith with. Talk with me or Pastor Stephen about opportunities. Don't make excuses for a distracted and stunted Christian life. Get started today...with a decision, a question, an exploration, a prayer. God will meet you in your sincere 'start' and lead you forward.

What 'D' word do you need to pay attention to and act upon today, to help safeguard your soul? Let this closing song help you start...or re-start!