

# The Greatest Thing in the World

by Paris Reidhead

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*The greatest thing in the world is to know the Lord Jesus Christ in a distinct experiential way, bringing joy, peace, and blessing to those who come to know him.*

**Duration:** 43:39

**Scripture:** Philippians 3:1

**Topics:** "Christian Life"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on Philippians chapter 3, particularly verse 10. He begins by emphasizing the importance of rejoicing in the Lord and warns against false teachings and influences. The speaker then discusses the concept of the greatest thing in the world, highlighting the value of talent and the importance of living a purposeful life. He also emphasizes the significance of knowing Jesus Christ and the joy that comes from having a relationship with Him. Throughout the sermon, the speaker encourages the audience to prioritize their faith and to find their ultimate fulfillment in Christ.

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## Transcript

Would you turn please to Philippians chapter 3, our theme this evening, the greatest thing in the world. And our text, Philippians chapter 3, verses 1 to 14, and particularly verse 10. I love the way this chapter begins.

It isn't the end of the chapter, but it's the middle of the letter, and yet he realizes that whatever he says, it is appropriate, thereafter it's appropriate, that he should begin this chapter saying, finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same thing to you, indeed, is not grievous, but for you it is safe. Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision, for we are the circumcision which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

Though I might also have confidence in the flesh, if any other man thinketh that he have, whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more. Circumcised the eighth day of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, and Hebrew of the Hebrews is touching the law of Pharisee, concerning zeal, persecuting the church, touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gained to me, those I counted loss for Christ? Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and who count them but done that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith, that I may know him, and the power

of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his suffering, being made conformable unto his death, if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead, not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect.

But I follow after it that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do, for getting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us join our hearts in a word of prayer.

Our Father we thank and praise thee thou has given us this testimony of thyself. We rejoice that there is one that thou has said could be an example to us, by inspiration declared, be followers of me as I am of Christ. And tonight as we study this life and ministry and testimony of the Apostle Paul in relation to life's values, we ask that our hearts may cleave to that which is good, may lay hold of that which is eternal, and that we may have such a sense of the appropriateness of life and of the values of life that will not be misled or misguided.

Should there be some among us who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ, might he tonight appear as the pearl of great price, for whom we're willing to sell all that we have that we might know him. For thy children that are present, may this evening be a time when the loveliness of Christ overwhelms their heart and the joy of knowing him becomes the supreme good of their lives. To that end meet us and minister to us and bring glory and joy to the heart of the one who loved us and gave himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. The greatest thing in the world, if you were to stand on the street anywhere in New York City and ask 10 people what in their estimation the greatest thing in the world is or the greatest thing in the world to them, I'm sure you would have just as many answers as you have people whom you ask the question. The man of society and such you might meet on most any corner in our city, the one of the 400 so-called, would be quick to say, if he were honest, why the greatest thing in all the world is the right birth.

Choose your grandparents and your parents well and all the rest will be rather made easy for you. Well this is rather difficult to do and if this were the final answer, most of us would have no way of sharing with him his enthusiasm for the right birth. Should you meet a man of letters, the scholar, the educator, and were you to ask him the greatest thing in the world, he might, if he were honest with you, say they'll choose the right school.

Makes all the difference in the world if you go to the right school. All your life you're working with these that you've known and met and therefore it's excellent to get a good beginning. But you would not have any difficulty if you stood there very long and meeting someone that's on the street that's very wealthy.

Certain sections of the city, at least, this would not be too difficult. Here is a man getting into his chauffeur-driven limousine at three o'clock in the afternoon on Wall Street and you say to him, pardon me sir, what is the greatest thing in all the world? And his answer would be the right business. Make the right business connections, determine what you want to be, set your goal, and then pursue it with that determination that won't brook failure and only uses failure for greater success.

The right business. But it wouldn't be difficult again in a metropolis such as ours to find someone that's an artist and whose pictures are being shown and displayed and who is there waiting to talk to when he might come. Pardon me sir, but what do you consider to be the greatest thing in all the world? And he would say the gift of talent.

Oh to have talent. If you have not been endowed with talent then there's a definite ceiling and limit to what you can achieve in life. And I would hold therefore that the greatest thing in all the world is to have received that heritage that can't be bought or purchased of talent and ability that can be developed and trained indeed, but you have to have the rudiments of the matter or else it isn't possible.

But again I say you would soon find a man of religion. By his garb or by his attitude somehow you'd recognize him and you'd say and what sir is to you is the greatest thing in all the world. And if he were honest following his professional life with care and answering your question he'd probably say the right church.

It's so important that you belong to the right church, the one that has a tradition behind it, the one that has a wealth of information and material and all that is there that can contribute to the spiritual and cultural development of its people. No, if you're to serve in life you've got to belong to the right church. A philosopher would be next and you'd ask him what he considered the greatest thing in the world and he might suggest love or truth or freedom or some other abstract value that to him appeared particularly beautiful due to the line of his contemplation and his thought.

Now all of these things are important, all of them are valuable. And I do not think that you would get these answers from the individuals as you met them. They would like to know why you were asking.

If you go out you can undoubtedly prove me wrong. But I am trying to relate what the most honest answer would be in relation to their life experience. And I think I've come somewhere near the point.

But if you come to the Bible you do not find that any of the answers that you could expect to come from men are there. The greatest thing in the world is not as Henry Drummond wisely and well said to his generation with great success and emphasis by the way love. For in a sense love is an abstraction.

It isn't just love or truth or purity. As valuable as these are as great as the loss when they're absent and as precious as their possession they're not certainly not the greatest thing in all the world. I think in the portion of scripture that I have read we have God's answer to this question.

The question doesn't occur in the text but I think that it is implied in the text. Certainly we can infer it from the text. Paul is here representing in his natural relationship to himself and his family and his nation and his religion those that wealth and those values that would seem exceedingly precious.

I am quite amazed and quite delighted I should say when I find among my friends that have come to New York City from other lands a deep respect and appreciation for their cultural heritage. I find among my Armenian friends even though they have no land now a great loyalty to all that has made them a noble people and my heart rejoices in this. I find among my German friends and Scandinavian friends and Chinese friends and Indian friends and from all the lands of the world a right and proper appreciation for that which has been contributed to them by their heritage.

I think nothing is more depressing than to see children grow up in a home here in this land, a first generation home if you please, where they have repudiated their parents calling them old country or some other term expressing their indifference or actual contempt. This is in a sense personal as well as national suicide for we'll have to recognize that every land has a cultural contribution to be made to those that have come from it and to those of us that have not been so fortunate as to share it how grateful we ought to be for any that we can get from those that have written of it or have expressed it to us. Paul had a natural

wealth.

Our Jewish friends here in New York City observing the Jewish New Year and all the feasts and all the ceremonies and taking such great personal pride in the fact that they are Jewish represents something of what Paul had as an inheritance from his ancestors and he tells us a little about this. He had achieved great civil distinction living as he did in a people that had great value on personal talent and ability. He was early recognized as a man of great promise.

He was given an opportunity for education of course. He did as all others were forced to do. He went to the synagogue school.

He began to learn the Torah of the Talmud and was prepared by I believe for life by his apprenticeship in the tent making trade up there in Tarshish. But that grand brain, that magnificent personality, that indomitable character revealed itself when he was a youth and so he was privileged to go as a tutored student to Gamaliel and so it was that he was prepared in the right school for the right business in the right nation and he achieved distinction, civic distinction, so much so that when the crisis arose over the church, Paul became the leader of the Kefauver committee of the first century, the one that was investigating rackets. If you recall that the honored late Kefauver did such noble work in this connection for our land, well that was the responsibility turned over to the apostle Paul to prove that the Christians were a threat to national security and national life and to exterminate this society.

This I say was some measure of that which he had achieved in his relative youth for he wasn't an old man at the time. Then his moral qualities stand out in such a way that they seem unequal. Here is a man of such integrity, a man of such impeccable honesty, a man who has his word so respected by his elders that they give him practically a blanket permission to pursue the interests of Jewish religion any place that he wishes to go.

He has been given unprecedented powers because they have understood that he wouldn't abuse them, that he would act in their best interest. His character is recognized. What shall we say of his religious attainments? A Pharisee, a Hebrew, circumcised the eighth day, and in this day of the tribe of Benjamin, an honored lineage, his genealogy had been preserved somehow.

Most of the Jews in the time of our Lord weren't too sure of their genealogy but certainly he was of the tribe of Benjamin. Not only was he religiously well born but he had pursued his faith with such devotion and such unswerving loyalty and such dedicated enthusiasm that he could say, and God honored his saying it, for it was true as touching the law outwardly, touching the law blameless. All right, this is his wealth.

These are the values of his life. These were the goals that he pursued. Now how important were they to him? You'll see that Paul was prepared to release all that seemed to be precious.

Everything that men seek, honor and position and authority and influence and reputation, Paul let go in one moment. He met the Lord Jesus Christ in a distinct experiential meeting and in that meeting everything changed. Up until the time he met Christ he was convinced that he that the Lord Jesus was an imposter.

He was convinced that the Christian message had been fabricated from the delirious minds of over-enthusiastic fishermen and humble folk that wanted to attain a position they otherwise would never

secure. That it was simply nothing more than a social revolt that had nationalistic tinges to it. And consequently he did feel that he would serve a good purpose by destroying the Christian church.

But you recall there on the road to Damascus he had a revelation of Jesus Christ. Of this he said, when it pleased God to reveal his son in me. And in that revelation that Jesus Christ was God.

God come in the flesh. Very God of very God. All that Paul had held to be precious.

His birth, his school, his business, his talent, his church. Everything seemed to be of such little importance that without a backward look he could let it go. How do I know it was so complete? Because he gave a quitclaim deed to the Lord Jesus Christ there as he lay upon the ground before he even arose upon his feet.

He didn't wait to argue. He didn't wait to debate nor question nor criticize nor qualify. Lord what will thou have me to do? He had now come face to face with the living God.

And Jesus Christ was the living God. The Jehovah of the Old Testament is now the Jesus in Paul's life. And he has recognized him to be God.

What has happened to his sense of values? Hear him as he declares, the things that I counted gain to me, I now count loss to Christ. A complete revolution in value. A complete change of goal.

All that was in itself innocent and harmless, certainly not bad and could be very good. Unless it was in the immediate direct plan of Jesus Christ he counted to be positive evil. We've heard it sung by Faber, the ill thou dost bless is good and unblessed good is ill.

Paul saw that. And he there was willing to commit to the Lord Jesus Christ all that seemingly had been of sufficient worth and value is to merit his most loyal efforts. Everything that men treasure most Paul said was to him as refuse as long as it was outside of the immediate will of the Lord Jesus Christ for him.

That which had value therefore was not valuable in itself. Position no longer had meaning in itself. Money no longer had meaning in and of itself.

Authority, you name it. And he describes to you this that when one meets Jesus Christ nothing has that's in the experience of his life has value apart from the will of God. If God wanted him in the prison on feasting on bread and water then he was prepared to be abased.

He would gladly suffer the beating with the cat and nine tails or with the rods or whatever it might be for this was the will of God for him. And in his recognition that Jesus Christ himself alone gives the proper perspective and proper value to life Paul was prepared to act intellectually honestly in relation to all the experience that came to him. He could in a sense kiss the hand of the jailer that buffeted him as long as he knew that that hand struck at the permissive will of Jesus Christ.

He could accept the meager fare of bread and water as he was there in chains in the dungeon as being a feast for a gourmet as long as he knew that this was what Christ wanted him to have at that time and in these circumstances. And the whole of life's value now was related to a person. All value had to come from Christ nothing had value in and of itself to him any longer.

Paul is thus by what he has stated here declared that to him and I believe by revelation of the Spirit of God to us that which is the greatest thing in all the world is to know the Lord Jesus Christ. You notice that I did

not say that it is Jesus Christ. He is infinitely beyond all such expressions that we might use.

But the greatest thing in all the world that can happen to a person said Paul by this clear testimony is to know in a distinct experiential way Jesus Christ. That I may know him is the expression that he uses in the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his suffering being made conformable unto his death. For he said there was an excellency in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

You saw it there wherein he said he counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus. Excellent indeed. Who can consider God the incarnate God dying for his rebellious creatures and not be absolutely amazed as he hangs upon the cross in your place instead and you know now in the light of the word that the one who is there enduring the agony despising the shame is the one by whom the worlds were made.

Yes even at that time the ones by whom the world was held together for not only were all things made by him but by him all things consist and that literally means held together. How can you gaze in the face of the son of God and not be overwhelmed and amazed to think that you are the rebellious creature for whom he was willing to die. And so Paul said he counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus dying for him.

He then went on to say who or I go on to say who can view the wisdom and the power and the goodness of God in this plan of salvation and this provision of salvation through his dying son without confessing that great is the mystery of godliness. How marvelous it is to think that that this is how God chose to redeem us. Now Paul said the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus excellent in its design to save us from hell and from our sin excellent in its means that God himself was prepared and willing to suffer that we might live.

But Paul said that I might know him and this excellent knowledge because of the effect that it has upon all who do come to know him. Notice that he declares that he's been under great trial. Men do strange things under trial.

Some are very stoical and grit their teeth and endure all that can be done. It's amazing how much power the human personality has to suffer. But that's not what Paul is doing.

He's not simply displaying that ability to endure physical pain and agony without flinching or whimpering or whining. There's something far beyond that in what Paul is doing. He's not just as surviving.

He's not just submitting. Paul is discovering joy and peace and blessing and can say finally brethren rejoiced in the Lord always and again I say rejoice. And here is a man that's undergoing every kind of trial not somehow but triumphantly.

But you see it wasn't just the trial of body. The trial of the flesh being bruised over and over again. The trial of the soul was even greater for all the tests that came upon him.

Betrayed by his friends and despised by his brethren. How enormous is the difficulty that Paul encounters and what constant resting and twisting and turning there is upon this man's spirit. And at any time he could have walked out of it but he wouldn't.

He had discovered that in the midst of this trial the comforting presence of the Lord Jesus Christ and so he could say the excellency of the knowledge of Christ that and sustained him in trial of body and of soul. But

there was another area of trial in Paul's life and that was satanic pressure. Probably you will not encounter this where you are actually coming to grips with Satan because Paul was that prince of servants and had such a ministry.

Satan himself buffeted and attacked and bruised and beat the man and yet the Lord Jesus Christ so sustained Paul and so strengthened him that he was able to survive gloriously in this conflict. But not only did Paul speak of the effect that it had in comforting during trial but he also said that to know Jesus Christ utterly transforms the life, changes a into the image and likeness of God, brings one to a vital relationship with God where he is father and you are child. Look at him before his conversion he is persecuting believers.

After his conversion the apostle Paul is now saying that he is willing to be accursed that is to be damned to be destroyed eternally if somehow through his death his Jewish brethren can be saved. Now what's happened? They say well Paul you see had an epileptic seizure on the road to Damascus. Well if that was what happened then I'd say let's go get inoculated for it shall we? No indeed this man has had such a character transforming experience that the one who was persecuting believers now is turning about and saying I'm willing to be accursed for my brethren's sake.

What's happened? Something's happened to him so utterly transforming that it's not Saul of Tarsus anymore it's Paul the beloved apostle of Jesus Christ. Before his conversion he was slaying the friends of Christ and now he's willing to die for the enemies of Christ. Such a difference, such a change, such a complete revolution in his life.

But you see Paul not only spoke of the excellency of knowing Christ because it would sustain and comfort in trial and change character but that it would avail for the salvation of all who would open their hearts to the Lord Jesus Christ and so come to know him. He believed that everyone who would repent of their sins and savingly embrace Christ as he had done could know him as he knew him. Paul understood that God has no stepchildren, that in this father's family everyone could have the same experience that he had.

Now that's the difference between modern missions and present and first century missions. I've been a missionary and I've lived these many years in relation to missionaries and the same is true at home but on the mission field everywhere that I know of with few exceptions we have the professionally trained missionary, the professionally trained Christian worker and leader and he goes out to the field and he gathers together converts, people that have been saved that have been born again and from this number of few are given special opportunity and special instruction and special training and so they are able to take their place in the structure that's being erected as the expression of the faith in that particular land and place. Now not so with Paul, not so with the where he went he didn't leave converts, if you please he left Paul's.

Now there's a great deal of difference. They were converts, they were Christians, they had been born again but somehow or other the gospel was so simple that he could take a group of people and in three months he could instruct them in all that was essential to their becoming effective workers for Christ and furthermore he could lead these people in the same relationship with Christ that he had. They had the same relationship to the Holy Spirit, they had recognized that there was anointing and gifts of the Spirit and enablings of the Spirit and they'd found their place in the body of Christ.

So Paul didn't just leave converts he left if you please Paul he left Paul's. This was geometric extension and not arithmetic and Paul therefore believed that the excellency of the knowledge of Christ was not

confined to a few professionals but it was the birthright and the privilege of everyone that was forgiven of the sins.

Paul also believed that the Lord Jesus Christ was prepared not simply to save from the past this was a glorious truth that he emphasized everywhere he went but Paul declared constantly and in every form of expression possible to make the truth clear to the human mind that what had happened to Jesus Christ had happened to him not simply for historical view but that the one to whom he wrote Paul himself and you and me were identified with Christ at the time it happened so that when Christ was crucified you were crucified I was crucified when Christ was buried you were buried and so was I when Christ was quick quickened so were you and so he wrote and so he taught so much so that he said when Christ was seated at the right hand of the Father you were seated with him now you are to understand

that you're to view yourself as crucified with Christ you're to present your body to him a living sacrifice and Jesus Christ is to live in you his own life now Paul says this is the greatest thing in all the world the greatest thing in all the world for a human being is to know the indwelling Christ there's nothing that equals it no position that men can attain no products they can bring no position they can offer no gold or wealth that they can bestow nothing equals this glorious privilege of being filled with all the fullness of God of knowing the indwelling Christ the greatest thing in all the world said he is that you can know him in the power of his resurrection in the fellowship of his suffering being made conformable unto his death he said I have experienced this I have understood

this for years but I have not yet explored it to the full nor appropriated all that it entails and all that it offers so I press toward the mark of the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus and as long as I live I realize that there are enormous plateaus of privilege that I've never yet scaled and made mine this is the greatest thing in all the world to know Jesus Christ not only to know of him historically and scripturally but to have a personal experiential relationship with him that it continually enlarges continually deepens it becomes continually more precious and real than it's ever been before this said he has that goal which alone is worth living and dying for well if you will understand this if somehow or other you're going to be not derelict in your other duties if you work

in a store you're going to endeavor to allow this indwelling Christ to give you wisdom and skill that you will be the most effective employee that the store has if you work in a shop or a fire factory or an office or a school then you're going to understand that the goal of your being is to know God not simply to achieve success and that the success that you achieve is simply an expression of your love and your worship that whatever you do in word or deed you will do all on account of the repudiation of Jesus Christ by his indwelling presence and his power Paul would go so far as to say I translate it and paraphrase it into our thinking patterns today that you haven't begun to live until you've entered into the fullness of Christ you do no forgiveness to no pardon is certainly a great

release of mind and of spirit and the burden is lifted but that's not the goal the goal is to be filled with the fullness of God the goal is to be filled with the spirit of God the goal is to know him this is the greatest thing in all the world the indwelling Christ union fellowship oneness indwelling this said he surpasses all other interests and concern and privileges it won't make you derelict in any but it will keep your values right it will keep you thinking clearly it will keep things in perspective and you won't go wandering off and listening to the siren voice of something that's going to allure you away from him if you've once drunk of him and tasted of him and eaten of him I've heard it said you know he's so heavenly minded he's no earthly good I don't believe that for a moment

I don't believe that for a moment I believe that that person that's living in the heavenlies is the most effective in his walk and work and live life in the earth ways because he will have the Lord Jesus Christ the king of kings and the lord of lords related to him in such a way that he's able to fulfill all the right and noble and proper functions of life put it again I don't believe we begin to understand what God intended to be the glory and joy and blessedness of being a human being until we begin to know the fullness of God the greatest thing in all the world that I may know him in the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his suffering being made conformable unto his death oh together let us press toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus

shall we bow together in prayer now we've said in the course of the message that he believed that the privilege of any believer was the privilege of all that God had no stepchildren God didn't treat others with the kindness that he withheld from some but if you're a child of God all he asks is that you seek him with your own heart love him for himself and that you desire to know him not that you can use him to him or particularly that he'll use you but just that knowing him is the fulfillment of all your real reason for being and then let him use you where and as and when and how he pleases oh make no bargains with God tonight don't try to lay hold of him for something you'll get from him or even something you'll bring to him he's not asking for a lot of promises you can't keep he's

simply asking that you understand that he himself is the reward of love's desire he died out of a longing for you with a broken heart and yearning for you he loves to be longed for he wants to be wanted that i may know him not to use him not to get from him but just because in knowing him he's fulfilled and so am i for i was made for God oh somehow let this become to you the highest good the greatest thing in all the world and you'll be amazed how quickly God will lead you into that relationship with him our heavenly father we're eternity-bound men and women we're all nearer to the grave than we've ever been before nearer to the time when we'll see the one last week to live one less service to attend and we've heard enough tonight to change our lives it changed pauls oh grant God of grace

that somehow the truth of the hour shall grip us that the greatest thing in all the world is to know thee not just to know about thee but to know thee in a distinct experiential relationship we have so many lesser ambitions lesser goals somehow purify all our longing and desire we hear again the word you shall search for me and you shall find me when you shall seek for me with all your heart grant that this shall be to us the greatest thing to know thee the living God breathe upon us breath of God let us go not as we came should there be those who do not know thee or have special reason for dealing with thee and need help and counsel give them the wisdom to stay and make this the night of dealing grant Lord that the all that thou has purposed for this night shall be fulfilled in us for

Jesus sake amen let us stand for the benediction the invitation has been given in prayer God knows your need and if you need help or desire counsel we do entrust that you'll stay that's why we're here now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the communion the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be in abide with each of us now till we meet again amen

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