

How Do I Stay Safe?

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[0 : 0 0] so philippians 3 starting at verse 1 further my brothers and sisters rejoice in the lord it is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again and it is a safeguard for you watch out for those dogs those evildoers those mutilators of the flesh for it is we who are the circumcision we who serve God by his spirit who boast in Christ Jesus and who put no confidence in the flesh though I myself have reasons for such confidence if someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh I have more circumcised on the eighth on the eighth day of the people of Israel of the tribe of Benjamin a Hebrew of Hebrews in regard to the law a Pharisee as for zeal persecuting the church as for righteousness based on the law faultless but whatever were gains to me and I consider loss for the sake of Christ what is more I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord for whose sake I have lost all things I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ and be found in him not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law but that which is through faith in Christ the righteousness that comes from

God on the basis of faith I want to know Christ yes to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings becoming like him in his death and so somehow attaining to the resurrection from the dead this is the word of the Lord thanks Ali for reading and if you could keep your Bibles open for me at page 1180 if the fallen close that's where we are page 1180 Philippians chapter 3 that would be a real help to me we're a church all about Jesus here at St Silas the Jesus of history and so what we do at each of our services and a tri-church service is no different is that we're we're opening the Bible so that we can engage with who Jesus is why he came and what it means to follow him now it's my custom to pray to ask for God's help because our hope is when we open the Bible we're actually going to encounter the living God and the God that makes himself known to us so let's bow our heads and I'll pray for us heavenly father and gracious God we thank you that you have spoken to us in the person of Jesus Christ that you speak to us by your spirit through your word the Bible we ask that you'll give us eyes open to see who you are more clearly heads that can think about you in truth and hearts that are willing to respond rightly to what we hear for we ask in Jesus name amen well we've been in this series in

Philippians and tonight's passage in Philippians takes us right to the heart of the Christian faith and it answers a key question that really any faith has to answer if there is a God how do I make sure that I'm on good terms with him the language that gets used in the passage to reflect that question is the word righteousness and we have it in verse 6 and then twice in verse 9 righteousness it's the language of the courtroom righteousness is a legal verdict two weeks ago is it three weeks ago now the Supreme Court for our land handed down a verdict on Boris Johnson that he you know he'd taken the decision to close down Parliament at Westminster as you might remember and there was a Scottish court hearing about that and then it went up to the Supreme Court and Lady Hale the most senior judge in the land gave her judgment and she said he'd acted unlawfully in closing down Parliament and there were lots of headlines about that she'd had like a spider on her brooch and he'd once said he was like said he was like the Incredible Hulk so there was these headlines did you see that super spider girl smashes the Incredible Hulk but anyway Lady Hale gave this um this this uh handed down this judgment she was saying what what this man had what Boris Johnson had done was unlawful okay righteousness is like the opposite of that it's like having a hearing in court about what you've done and the judge handing down judgment is saying what you did was right what you did was right it's a stamp of approval and this is about the courtroom of God himself he's deeply concerned for how we as his people live the people he has made all around the world this is about how you could get a stamp on your life in that courtroom that says you were right approved by God that's the stamp approved by God and approval is something that we all long for isn't it I was reading an article in the Times recently by Amanda

Foreman under the headline why teenage girls are in crisis and she talked about how hard it is for not just for teenage girls but teenage girls she talked about young women generally today how life is very difficult and she talked about issues of social media addiction of self-harm and she talked about a key issue being longing for approval then recently we were looking at mental health among men we had a men's breakfast about that and it's no shortage of reports that there's a mental health crisis among men in Scotland and one of the problems is that lots of men feel they have to match up to a particular model of masculinity whether that's from the culture or from the media a particular lifestyle that they need to be seen to be leading and they they need to do that to be approved of by other men or by by other women by women and admitting that you're struggling or weak is unacceptable to that sort of ideal that we're supposed to attain to so lots of men go on in quiet desperation feeling unable to share that they're struggling so whether we're men or women it's worth asking ourselves am I someone who's longing for approval from a particular person perhaps from people generally even just from myself that I would I would feel better about myself I'd approve of myself I think we spend a lot of time in our lives behaving in certain ways conforming to certain patterns of behavior because we're looking for approval from someone well if there is a God who made us and he knows every secret of every heart surely his approval is what counts more than anything else and if he approves of me why would it then matter what anyone else thinks of me his verdict is the one that counts if that could sink in that my God approves of me he thinks I'm righteous might that not liberate me from needing to strive for acceptance and approval from other places but this passage starts with a warning that's our first point I've put the points inside the notice sheet if you find that helpful you might just prefer to listen but the warning is our first point it's a confidence that is shockingly dangerous a confidence that's shockingly dangerous the apostle Paul who wrote this letter early Christian leader writing to a church in verse one if you look in the second sentence there the second line he says it is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again and it's a safeguard for you he uses the language of safety so the implication is if you move away from what I told you before church you could be in grave danger I'm writing this again to you to keep you safe and he reminds them of the message he first brought to them and he calls it the gospel in this letter gospel is like bible jargon it's a bible word for momentous news and it's the news at the heart of the Christian faith the gospel and just look at the language that Paul uses of people who bring a counterfeit gospel an alternative gospel he says in verse two have a look watch out for those dogs those evildoers those mutilators of the flesh I don't know what you think about dogs you might be a dog lover but Paul isn't thinking of a pedigree labrador here okay he's not thinking of a corgi he's thinking of a mangy scavenger a first century stray dog and he's deliberately using provocative language here because the people he's describing who might overhear the letter read out in a church would have had them would have thought of themselves as clean and would have described

other people as dogs as unclean because they didn't tick the right boxes for them in terms of their behavior so he's turning the tables on those people and saying watch out for them they're the dogs and the issue was that within the early church as Paul's writing this letter there were people who thought that to stay right with God to be approved of by God you had to do stuff specifically you had to keep God's law from the Old Testament Paul himself was a Jew before he he became a Christian he saw who Jesus was and the Jewish people were people who believed the Old Testament as we now have it in the Bible the first half of the Bible first couple two-thirds of the Bible and Paul and other Jewish background believers came to see that Jesus was the one promised by the Old Testament but there were believers like that who like Paul had come from a deeply religious background keeping all these Old

[10:07] Testament laws circumcising their baby boys on the eighth day they were born after they were born keeping God's commandments as best they could and so they couldn't kind of lose that some of them and they they thought that even though you'd come to see that Jesus was God's Messiah the promised king who would come putting your trust in him might bring you into a good relationship with God but to keep going like that you needed to keep the Old Testament law that they'd always been keeping do all this religious stuff as the way on in the Christian life to stay righteous in other words the key question when we look at Philippians chapter 3 is when one day you stand before God and he says to you why should I why should I let you into heaven where will your confidence be what will you say why should God let you into heaven will you say let me in because I've done something let me in because I've been a good person let me in because I've been religious a religious person Paul uses a term in the chapter to describe that he calls it having

confidence in the flesh he means confidence in ourselves in what we've done and when you think about it that's what lots of people do they think religion is isn't don't they as though when we meet God he'll have a way of weighing up our the good things we've done and the bad things that we've done on a set of scales and if the good things outweigh the bad things then he'll let us into heaven we get his stamp of approval righteous so here's the shock Paul says if you think like that you are in grave danger and he proves that by his own example he gives us an impeccable religious cv just look with me from halfway through verse 4 where that second paragraph starts if have a look he says if someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh that is in the things they've done before

God I have more and then he lists his record of achievement his spiritual record of achievement his religious record because he's saying if you want to stay safe make sure you put no confidence in the flesh in the things you've done whoever you are I could beat you on that and I'm putting no confidence in my flesh so he's saying don't put any confidence in your religion your religious works he was as religious as it was possible to be circumcised on the eighth day that was the right day tick the box of the people of Israel that's good tick the box of the tribe of Benjamin that they were a good tribe a Hebrew of Hebrews a real religious insider notice as well as he says that it means you can't put confidence before God in your family background that's included in Paul's cv his religious tribe his family this is shocking isn't it that when you stand before God on the last day we mustn't dream of thinking we would say let me in because I'm from a Christian country let me in because my parents were really committed Christians if you've been to church thousands of times if you've sung in the choir you've been made an archbishop if you were made the pope Paul says no confidence in that and then his cv goes on from the religious stuff to just the good stuff doing good stuff being a good person verse 5 he says in regard to the law that is the law of God a Pharisee these deeply committed devoutly religious people as for zeal passion for God persecuting the church that's at the time what people thought you'd have to do because they hadn't realized that Jesus was God's Messiah as for righteousness based on the law faultless so if you just treat the ten commandments and the other old testament laws as external commands and look at how someone's performing next to them you would never find any fault with Paul you couldn't say that he'd been found wanting and if Paul therefore says

I can put no confidence in being a good person before God then none of us can do that if you think of the good people of our day I don't know who you might think of I was thinking about Lenny Henry the founder of comic relief you know done so much he's raised millions for charity you might think about NHS nurses a couple of weeks ago I was on a conference and I met this guy from Nigeria Ben Kwashi and he's a bishop in Nigeria in Joss where and because of the Islamist militant fighting there there are lots of children who've been orphaned as their parents have been killed and he and his wife Gloria have adopted over 50 children themselves that they have adopted over 50 children and they have as well as that just on the same land they live they've set up a child care center with a school for over 400 children they're unbelievable I just I just cannot understand how you can adopt over 50 children it's just unbelievable and that's the real shock folks of Philippians 3 is Paul's effectively saying if if that that woman Gloria Kwashi Ben's wife was to stand before God when she dies and say let me into heaven because of all the children I looked after and all the things I did for them she'd be in grave danger she would not be safe if she did that and that means we're all in danger now why is that why could God not accept us and be approving of us on the basis of what we've done it's about the standards and it's about the evidence first it's about the standards that God is perfectly good so to be righteous in his eyes we would need to have been perfectly good every moment of every day of our whole lives and it's no use thinking well I had a bad day yesterday but I'll make it up to God today because we just be doing our duty for today and the commands of God are love the Lord your God with all your heart all your soul all your mind and all your strength and then love your neighbor as yourself so if you imagine and this is how I used to think of it that you could rank everybody who's ever lived from maybe the worst person who's ever lived down here to the best person who's ever lived up here so you might put you know Stalin down here or something and then you might put Gloria Kwashi up here and you you might put your own mom up there or something and then you sort of think maybe there's a there's a standard somewhere in the middle and as long as I get over the line then I'll be righteous in God's sight and when you look at how Jesus describes how he lives even but how he describes God's standards you realize that if you were to rank everybody like that from the worst person who's ever lived there

to the best person who's ever lived there the standard that we need to be righteous by God isn't somewhere in the middle it's in the sky none of us is anywhere near it and as well as the standards that God uses it's about the evidence that he will use in the courtroom because he is a just God I don't know whether you're watching the capture at the moment on the BBC BBC drama it's really good it finishes on Tuesday very tense it's been a six-part drama but it's all about imagining a time in the very near future when CCTV is so comprehensive you can't really avoid it and so if anything it happens any incidents they can just check the CCTV and they can find out who did it and it's exploring in the drama the the it's a suspense thriller because basically they've worked out a way to correct they could talk about correction that they can manipulate the CCTV footage so if they they kind of think someone's probably guilty of something they just play with the footage and then they go look we've we filmed it so it's very disturbing but the the the thing is that that the problem in the drama is is that it makes you think what if there was suddenly film footage of of me doing something and I hadn't done it but folks when it comes to God the problem isn't what the footage might be manipulated to show the problem is that it would be truthful and show everything that we've ever said everything that we've ever thought everything that we've ever done and I'm sure that when he plays back that footage in his courtroom for any of us there will be some wonderful moments some brilliant moments in our lives but it's all going to be there so every moment of anger of lust of greed of selfishness it's accurate and it's comprehensive and that leaves us in desperate trouble that's what Philippians 3 is saying Paul is saying please don't go into that courtroom of God thinking that you can appeal to good things that you've done and the people who get offended by that message are people who are used to being approved of if you're someone who's used to being approved of then I guess the question we need to ask ourselves is could you have the humility as Paul had to have to accept the news that God's verdict on your life will not be approval so that's our first point a confidence that is shockingly dangerous from the first six verses but that makes our second point terrific news have a look with me at verse 8 the second point an approval that is scandalously offered an approval that's scandalously offered verse 8 and as we get to verse 9 there's a question for you to think about as we get to verse 9 whose righteousness is it whose righteousness is it end of verse 8 he says

I consider them that's all the good things he's done garbage that I may gain Christ and be found in him not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law but that which is through faith in Christ the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith so where does this righteousness come from it's not my own it comes from God not from me and it's given to me by faith when I trust his promises he gives it to me if we let go of our own attempts at being righteous our good works our religious works we can take hold of this gift that's on offer to us and God freely grants it to everyone who trusts him for it a righteous verdict in his courtroom a free gift and it's outrageously undeserved it's like I took my kids to school last week and October's arrived hasn't it in Glasgow so it's pretty cold and the kids had winter coats on for the first time and

[21 : 41] I don't know whether you remember when you were at school but you get to an age at school where it becomes you start to notice what other people are wearing it becomes more important to you the kind of jacket that people have got on the kind of trainers they wear now this is like just imagine you're at school and the pupil turns up who you know doesn't have any money and one day they turn up and they're wearing the best warmest most expensive designer winter jacket that money can buy what's the question that everyone's asking in the playground that morning where did you get that from how have you ended up with that jacket here in Philippians 3 that's the kind of question that we're left asking the offer is scandalous that whoever you are whatever you've done however badly you have lived you could turn to God tonight and he will give you as a gift his stamp of approval in his courtroom so that people would look at you and say where did you get that from we know you you don't deserve that where did we get it from and the answer is from Jesus Christ so verse 3 he says we boast in Christ Jesus in verse 8 he's considered everything a loss for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus he says

I consider them garbage that is the good things he's done that I may gain Christ and be found in him as though we're clothed in him in God's sight so when I worked as a I used to work as a lawyer before I trained to be a minister and I worked on a long complicated trial where the allegations of wrongdoing against our client were made from a long history of notes because it was about something that he'd done in his work there were lots of notes of meetings you know writing up the minutes of the meeting some of them were handwritten some of them were typed and they spanned

days day after day after day for many years and so in the courtroom court 72 in the high court of justice on the strand when you went in there were these imagine you've got a judge at the front and then you've got barristers either side and you've got lawyers behind them and minion lawyers like me and then you have this wall of files right down the centre of the room okay and the lever arch files are full of notes condemning our client note after note after note and the prosecuting barrister the claimant barrister gets up and he just goes through them day after day after day note after note then he was in this meeting and look at what he said he shouldn't have said that should he let's look at the next meeting then he was in this meeting look at what he said it was all there it was agony it went on day after day after day well picture the courtroom of God and imagine a series of files like that that record your life everything you've ever said and thought and done every impure thought you've ever had every bad thing you've ever done every time you've looked down on somebody else every website you shouldn't have looked at on the internet every time you've overindulged yourself and the accuser gets up and he can go through the record page after page the bible calls that the unfavourable record of our debts and imagine if as that's being read out and it's overwhelming the case against you the court clerk suddenly steps up to the judge's bench and there's this animated discussion and the judge calls the court to order and he says there's no doubt that these things have been done by this person in the dock but it's come to my attention that every single one of these debts has already been paid for somebody has already paid the penalty for this and you're free to go you're vindicated that's the breathtaking reality that allowed Paul to write Philippians chapter 3 that on the cross it's as though Jesus the only man who's ever lived who never did anything wrong it's as though there was a funnel above his head and all the wrongdoing of everyone who trusts him was placed on him and he paid the penalty for it when he died so that God can look at that death and offer his righteous verdict to you and me so folks this is how we get right with God there is no other way and it means anybody can have it but Paul writes these things to keep us safe because today just as in the first century this reality is not clearly understood and not clearly accepted by everybody and we need to be aware of that because we need the safeguards just as they did one thing we have to be aware of is the Olympic athlete version of Christianity I don't know whether you've come across this you may even have come tonight believing this it's the world championships at the moment you could think of that perhaps team GB got various medals over the weekend you know when an athlete gets a medal at a big event they get interviewed afterwards and the journalist often a former athlete themselves says congratulations fantastic achievement you've done so well and they say thanks thanks so much I'm so happy but you know I couldn't have done it without my mum and dad I couldn't have done it without my coach I just want to thank them they start thanking people around them we've all seen that haven't we now in the same way there's a message you can hear in churches today that would suggest we could stand before God on the last day when we meet him and somehow from our good deeds he would be able to say well done you've managed to be good enough to get to heaven and we could say thanks God but you know I couldn't have done it without you I made the standard but only by the strength you gave me and if we really mess up on the way then look because of what Jesus did because he was so magnificent it kind of it pleased God so much he set up a new system for you so that as long as you do certain things say certain prayers go to communion a bit or go to church often enough you can wipe out the bad stuff and then you can crack on again with the Olympic athlete way of getting righteous now Philippians 3 leaves us no room for that the only way we can be righteous is through what we sometimes technically call alien righteousness so rather than the idea of infused righteousness which is the idea that God gives us some strength and it helps us to be righteous rather than that we have to rely on alien righteousness not that it's from outer space but that it's alien to us and it's given to us as a gift Jesus' righteousness covers our efforts so that God sees us and he's delighted with us whatever is underneath as verse 9 says Paul wants to be found in him found in Christ and accepting that gift is completely life changing so we come to our third point a gift that is surpassingly valuable so in verse 7 look Paul's using the language of spreadsheets I don't know whether we've got any accountants here tonight or people who work with numbers but the idea of profit and loss accounts he's weighed things up and he's willing to lose something of value if it means he can get something more valuable so let's read again from verse 7 but whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ what is more [29 : 29] I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord for whose sake I have lost all things he has to let go of his own righteousness so that he can

take hold of authentic righteousness the gift but there are other costs as well Paul was writing that from prison to be a Christian he'd lost his reputation he'd lost his freedom he'd been locked away but he's willing to lose everything he has to lose to keep hold of the gift from Jesus of righteousness and the gift isn't just a righteous verdict at the end it's a relationship that starts the day you put your trust in him so did you see that he talks about in verse 8 the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord he says for whose sake I've lost all things he's lost things for his sake he talks about Christ Jesus my Lord because Jesus is alive again and so we start a relationship with him when we put our trust in him Paul knows what it is to grasp that love that Jesus has shown him and shown us to know a man who knows what we're like and went at great cost to himself to the cross so that he could clear up the mess Paul says knowing him is of surpassing value surpassing worth so what does life look like if you accept this gift of righteousness well it's a life of humility isn't it because we give up our own attempts to seek approval from God ourselves humility but it's a life of safety for any of us who might be thinking I could never be a Christian I've gone too far astray or God couldn't accept me because I've been too bad a Christian the question we need to ask ourselves is was Jesus righteous enough just imagine just imagine if Jesus turned up at the gates of heaven and God said sorry

I can't let you in you were not good enough we're going to have to turn you away Jesus it's madness isn't it that is what would have to happen for you if you trust in Jesus not to be accepted by God it's complete safety to put your trust in him and there's this relationship Jesus Christ as your Lord he loves you he'll never leave you he'll never let you down and knowing him is of surpassing worth so that certain future hope and that relationship now bring joy and that's why Paul started the whole reading with verse 1 just have a look at how we started further my brothers and sisters rejoice in the Lord joy would you like to have that joy you can have it by asking God to forgive you thanks to Jesus Christ and if you've never done it before today will be a great day to do that I'm going to pray for us now let's have a moment of quiet a chance for each of us to respond to God in our own hearts and then I'll say a prayer and you might feel you're not ready to pray this prayer yourself but it's just words you could echo in your own heart if you want to do that if you want to make ...

goodbye and you might say if you want to try Almighty God and loving Heavenly Father, we thank you for news in the Bible to keep us safe.

We're sorry for the things we have done wrong that mean we can have no confidence in our own doing, in our flesh. Thank you for the gift of righteousness from you offered to us through faith in Jesus.

[34 : 08] We accept that gift. Please forgive us. By your Spirit, help us from now on to live lives that do please you, not because we need to earn your approval, but rather because you've given us your approval.

Help us to respond rightly to this news. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.