

Christ the Most Excellent Standard

by Denny Kenaston

The sermon emphasizes the importance of having a deep reality of Christ in our lives, letting go of anything that stands in the way, and pursuing a most excellent knowledge, union, righteousness, relationship, power, and fellowship with Him.

Scripture: Psalm 42:1, Matthew 16:24, John 15:4, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Philippians 3:12-20, Colossians 3:1

Topics: "Following Jesus", "Christian Discipleship"

Description

Denny Kenaston preaches about the lifelong journey of forsaking all and following Jesus, emphasizing that this commitment is not just for new believers but for seasoned Christians as well. He highlights the importance of Christ being the ultimate Standard in our lives, surpassing all other standards and religious practices. Kenaston delves into the deep desire to continually 'win Christ' and the need to seek a most excellent knowledge, union, righteousness, relationship, power, fellowship, death, reward, and purpose in Him. He challenges believers to pursue a most excellent standard set by Paul and to be thus minded, following the example of those who walk in alignment with God's high calling.

Transcript

"God, what does it mean for a Christian, who's been a Christian for thirty years, to forsake all and follow Jesus?"

That's a good question for us older Christians. It's not only for the new believers to forsake all and follow Jesus. It's not something that you do once, and then it's smooth sailing from there on. This thing never ends, brothers and sisters.

Christ, the Most Excellent Standard

That's who He is. He is the Standard. Now I quickly say I do believe in standards. I believe the Word of God. I believe in living a holy life. I believe in taking this Bible literally, and living it out in a practical way in my life. I believe in standards. But Christ is the most excellent Standard. All those other things find their place somewhere below the glorious person of Jesus Christ.

What It Means to Win Christ

Paul said those words. We find them in our text. But what does it mean to win Christ? Paul had Christ. He knew Christ. He met Christ on the road to Damascus. So what does he mean when he says "That I might

win Christ"?

Some people like to divide the Bible into dispensations and say "The Gospels were for Jesus in His day, but now we're in the epistles." The following verses beautifully tie the teachings of the Apostle Paul in the epistles with the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospels. They do tie together. There is no separation. The epistles are a beautiful revelation of what Christ gave when He walked upon this earth.

And when he [Jesus] had called the people unto him with the disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?[1]

That statement was made in the context of losing your life while you're trying to find it; and in losing that life, finding true life.

What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall he give in exchange for his soul?[2]

That verse is not only for the lost person. That's for every single one of us. What shall it profit us, brethren, if we gain the whole world and lose our own soul?

Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.[3]

The light of the body is the eye--the eye of the heart, and the eye of your head--if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil,--or anything other than single--thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!--if the light that is in thee be religion (and religion is darkness) how great is that darkness!--No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.[4]

Christ, the Most Excellent Standard

We find in Philippians 3 the words of the Apostle Paul, who had a single eye. He is a beautiful example of a man of like passion as you and I, who had a single eye all the days of his Christian life. Paul is warning in verse 2: Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. Paul is talking about religion in that verse. He's speaking about the religious Judaizers, who are going along behind him from church to church trying to convince the believers that it's Christ plus circumcision, plus the law of Moses, and plus all the things in the law of Moses. Oh yes, Christ is great. Christ is fine. Yes, Christ is Messiah. But it's Christ the Messiah plus. Paul called them dogs, evil workers, and the concision. Very interesting, isn't it?

But the true disciple of Christ he defines in the next verse. For we are the circumcision. We've had our hearts circumcised. We worship God in the spirit. We rejoice in only one thing: Christ Jesus. We have no confidence in the flesh. That's what a Christian is. We are the circumcision.

Paul then makes this statement. Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more. So Paul is saying "If all you other people think you have a reason to put confidence in your flesh, I have more reason to put confidence in my flesh

than you have to put it in yours."

But notice again, that the list which Paul gives as example that he is more tempted to trust in the flesh than they are, is a list of religion. Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin--there's his heritage--an Hebrew of the Hebrews;--trying with everything I can to be everything a Hebrew is supposed to be--as touching the law, a Pharisee;--that's the most zealous of the Hebrews--concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. Now those are all religious things. Because many of us come from a religious background, we are prone to slip into religion instead of the vital reality of Christ in our life. It's good for us to know that it's easy to slip into religion and put our confidence in those things because of something we know already, because of things we've learned, because we know what to do, we know what to say, and we know how to act. It can all be just religion. There's a temptation there, and we want to stay away from it. We want Christ, only Christ.

But what things were gain to me--that is, he was seeking his own life, he was trying to have it all together. What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.--I've chosen to lose my life 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 do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.

That I May Win Christ

Notice that phrase. The man who is making that statement has been a Christian for about twenty years. Yet listen to his words: 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 do count them but dung, that I may win Christ. He's twenty years down the Christian road, and all he wants to do is win Christ.

"What do you mean, you want to win Christ. Paul? You have Christ!" We're going to see that this is something you don't ever attain to. This is life-long Christianity. This thing never goes away. This thing becomes the passion of your heart and your life. And if it's not, you've lost your way! I don't care where you go to church. I don't care what good sermons you may hear. If it's not the passion of your heart, you've lost your way.

A Most Excellent Knowledge

Paul is seeking a most excellent knowledge. Listen to what he says: I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. Now you have to understand Paul's perspective in this. You have to understand what he's saying. Let's read one verse quickly that will shed light on what we're speaking about. You remember this is Paul the apostle. This was Saul. He was a Pharisee. He was a very religious man. He was one of those who, touching the law, was blameless. His whole life was filled with knowledge: knowledge of all the commandments, knowledge of the Torah, knowledge of the Mishna, knowledge of all the Sabbath day laws. This man was filled with laws, rules, and standards. He was filled with knowledge. But suddenly he got a glimpse of the knowledge, the excellent knowledge, of Christ Jesus his Lord. It made that other stuff look like dung. He got a glimpse of the excellency of Christ Jesus his Lord.

For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts. Why? To give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ[5]. The light of the glory of the gospel of Christ shone in that man's heart, and all of a sudden he saw the excellency of the knowledge of Christ

Jesus.

He said, "What else is there? You can have your long list of rules. You can have your thick books of Sabbath laws. You can have your thick books on the Mishna, and the interpretation of the Mishna, and the interpretation of the interpretation of the Mishna. You can have all of those books. I have found the most excellent knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, and I count everything else but dung for that."

That's where Paul was. Imagine what it was like having a stack of books full of laws and rules and all those things. Then he finds himself here with people who have been with Christ. They're talking about this man and how He walked on the earth. They tell Paul stories about how He lived, the things that He did, the things that He said. Paul says "You can have your rule books! I want to look at Jesus! I want to see how He walked. I want to see how He talked. I want to see how He lived while He was on the earth. That is the most excellent knowledge. You can have your rule books. I'll take Jesus instead."

It doesn't stop there. That's just going into the Gospels and looking at the way the Lord Jesus lived. He was God in the flesh. He was God incarnate. He was the express image of the Father. If you want to see what God is like in human flesh you study the life of Jesus in the Gospels. That in itself makes those rule books pale into nothingness, but that's not all. Now Paul is in the New Testament, he's living in the Spirit, and he's being filled with the spirit of revelation in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. He doesn't only see Christ walking around in a human body upon the earth, he sees Him highly exalted above everything. He sees Him seated in heavenly places. He sees Him ruler over all things. Paul sees Jesus seated at the right hand of the majesty on high. He sees Him in eternity future with all the nations of the world gathered around Him. He sees Him there in all that beauty and all that glory, and he says, "You can have your rule books. I'll take Jesus!"

A Most Excellent Union

Paul again says, "I count all things but loss for a most excellent union of being found in Him." This was the motivation of Paul's life. He sought a union with Christ.

It may puzzle you to see these words. Many times people who hold strongly to the doctrine of eternal security will read a verse like this and not be sure what it means. I can remember years ago, reading verses like that and thinking "What does that mean? You want to be found in Him? Paul, you are in Him. What do you mean? You know theologically you are in Him, Paul, so why are you saying you want to be found in Him?" But I came to the place where I understood that not only does God require of me that I be positionally in Christ, but that I be vitally in Christ. A most excellent union. John chapter 15 clearly explains that. Jesus, speaking to His disciples, gave them the insights that they were going to need when He went back to the Father. What does He say to them? "I am the vine, ye are the branches[6]. Abide in Me. Be in union with Me. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me[7]." That's the way Jesus said it.

This is the way Paul says it: "I count everything else but loss for that most excellent union of being found in Him." Every one of us is responsible to be found in Him. Our days are numbered. We don't know the number of our days. We may have one more day. We may have ten more days. We may have twenty more years. But the point is, when that day comes, or when the Lord comes, we must be found in Him. We must be found in Him in a most excellent union. That's the responsibility of every one of us. We need to get our focus back where it should be, and realize "I lost my way. Materialism has clouded me, and I can't see Christ like I should."

A Most Excellent Righteousness

I want you to notice also that he's counting all those things but dung for a most excellent righteousness. He's not going to be satisfied anymore with the righteousness which is by the law. He has found a righteousness which far surpasses that which is by the law, or that of keeping rules and regulations. He's found a righteousness which flows out of a relationship, an excellent union with Christ. He says "I want to be found in that most excellent union, with a most excellent righteousness which cannot be touched by laws and rules and regulations."

What is the difference? It is a righteousness which flows out of that union with Christ. I am the vine, ye are the branches. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself. What is the fruit? Righteousness. "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, no more can ye bear fruit of yourself, except you abide in Me," Jesus said. Now this is a most excellent righteousness which flows out of a union with God. We must have that kind of righteousness.

But it goes deeper than that. Think about those verses in 2 Corinthians chapter 3 where Paul tells us the positive side of a sanctified life. He says you can come to God with an open face, beholding in a glass the glory of the Lord, and be changed into the same image. That's an excellent righteous-ness! You can be changed into the very image of Jesus. Paul looked at that, and then he looked at those rules and regulations that he used to keep, and said, "I am not interested in them anymore. I want to have a most excellent righteousness where the very God of heaven stamps His own image deep in my heart."

"Oh to be like Thee, blessed Redeemer, pure as Thou art. Come in Thy sweetness, come in Thy fullness. Stamp Thine own image deep on my heart," the song says. That is a most excellent righteousness. That is something you can spend your whole life pursuing.

A Most Excellent Relationship

Paul says these words, "I count all things but loss that I may know Him." If anybody knew Him, Paul knew Him. Yet here he is twenty years into his Christian life saying "I count everything else but loss that I might have this most excellent relationship. I want to know Him."

There's something of a paradox in this matter of knowing God. It seems the more you get to know Him, the more you want to know Him. There's a satisfaction in getting to know Him, but there is also a holy dissatisfaction. It is a sanctified dissatisfaction that says "I want more! I want to know Him more!" Just like the prophet David in the Old Testament, who said these words, and many others like them. As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God[8]. That was Paul's heart. "I want to know You, Lord. I want to know You more."

Is that our testimony? Is that the cry of our heart? "I want to know Him. I want to know God intimately. I want to know God deeply. I want to know Him more than I already know Him." When you come to grips with Christ, the most excellent Standard, it leaves every one of us flat on our face. We all need to be there. That's the secret to the Christian life. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are they that mourn. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst. Blessed are the pure in heart[9]. That puts us all right where we need to be. A most excellent relationship is what Paul desired. Everything else fell into the background.

And so, I answer my own plea. "Lord, what does it mean for a 30 year old Christian to forsake all and follow Jesus?" It means that anything that stands in the way of this kind of reality in my life has to go. Not

only do new believers have to forsake everything, or lose everything including their reputation, and whatever else. It's not just them, it's me also.

A Most Excellent Power

"I count all things but loss that I may know experientially the power of His resurrection." Notice the flow of the words: That I may know him, and the power of His resurrection[10]. Or, that I may know Him experientially, and that I may know experientially the power of His resurrection.

Paul said "All I want is the power of His resurrection. I want to know the experiential power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Those were the very words and the very burden of the prayer of the Apostle Paul as he prayed for the church there at Ephesus. That ye may know . . . the exceeding greatness of His power.[11] There it is. That you may know experientially the exceeding greatness of His power, being that power which raised Christ from the dead. Hallelujah! Again, that puts every one of us on our face, doesn't it?

You say, "Well I know what God's power is all about." Yes, that's right. And so do I. But God has so much more. The exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe[12]. This is a most excellent power. We must come to grips with it. I appreciate the songs that are sung. I appreciate the prayer meeting. I appreciate hearing over and over people speaking out their words to God. "Lord, fill me with Your Spirit. Give me more of Your Spirit, God. I'm not satisfied. Give me more of Your power, God." Those are good words to pray. I'm not talking about looking for some ecstatic experience. I'm talking about a power which produces a holy life and wins souls for Jesus Christ. Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me[13]. Witnesses by the holy life you live and witnesses with the open mouth that you speak. I'm speaking about power for those things, a most excellent power.

A Most Excellent Fellowship

I count all things but loss . . . that I may know the fellowship of His sufferings. "That I may know the fellowship, the koinonia, the deep intimate fellowship, of His sufferings." This was one of the goals of the Apostle Paul. You say "I'm not sure if I'm ready to pray a prayer like that." That's because you're on the wrong side of it, my friend. You see, Paul was on the other side of this thing. He knew what suffering was. By the time he wrote those words he already had been stoned at Lystra. He'd already been through all kinds of sufferings. He had been lonely, empty, hungry, cold, imprisoned, and beaten. All these things had happened to him. He's on the other side of the fellowship of His sufferings. Paul has tasted the sweet, deep, intimate, close, fellowship with Jesus which comes when you suffer with Him. There is a deeper, intimate fellowship with God when you are one who suffers with Him. Everyone who knows what I'm talking about would agree with me. There's a sweetness there that doesn't come any other way but to enter in to the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ. Like Paul says, [I] fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake[14].

Paul knew what suffering was all about, but Paul also knew about the life of Jesus which was manifest in his mortal body when he suffered for Christ. It seems absolutely radical. He is saying, if you can imagine it, "I want more suffering. Oh, I want to learn what it is to suffer with my Lord. I want to taste more of that fellowship of suffering with my Lord." It seems almost ludicrous to us easy going American Christians. But this is the way it was with Paul. It was that way in the early church. And it was that way with the early Anabaptists. Those brothers and sisters tasted the fountain of this kind of sweet fellowship, and they wanted more.

There were times when somebody got into the jail in the middle of the night and said, "Wake up! The door's open. Run!" And the Anabaptists said, "I'm not running out of here. I'm going to stand right here. They're going to kill me tomorrow. I'm not running. Are you crazy? I get to lose my head for my Lord. Go shut the door and leave me alone."

It happened more than once. How could they be so ludicrous? They were on the other side of this suffering thing. Ah, a most excellent fellowship, this fellowship of his suffering.

Do you know anybody like that? I'm sure you do. You think in your mind of one of those suffering saints. Oh, the hard times they go through. What kind of person is it that you're thinking about, who goes through so many hard things? So Christ-like, so sweet, so anointed, so broken. We have a dear lady back in our fellowship who is that way. She's been excommunicated for many, many years from her church. Her husband hardly talks to her. Oh she knows suffering like very few know! There is hardly anybody sweeter than her. You should hear her when she prays. She prays with a broken anointing upon her life. Why? Because of the fellowship of His sufferings. That's what it is, and Paul knew it. He said, "You can have all those other things. Give me Jesus. Give me the depths of Jesus. That's what I want."

A Most Excellent Death

We're going deeper now. A most excellent death. Being made conformable unto his death. That sounds like martyrdom. That sounds like the spirit of a martyr. That sounds like a man who has fallen into the ground and died, and therefore he's no longer abiding alone. Maybe you abide alone. Maybe you're a fruitless Christian. You wonder why you've never won a soul to Jesus Christ in all your days. You need to fall into the ground and die.

I do believe it has practical, every day applications. But I believe Paul was looking further than that when he longed for the conformation to Christ's death. I believe he was one of those who thought, "Oh, if I could die for my Lord. If I could die the way my Lord died. If I could go through the suffering, and begin to sense some of the things the Lord sensed. I want that." And guess what? He did just that. They didn't hang him on a cross. But He died alone. He died a failure. We read that in 2 Timothy, reading between the lines. He died alone. Everybody forsook him. He died "a failure." Sound like somebody else you know? He died, having been forsaken by so many. But look at the fruit of this man's life. There it is! Somehow he saw those things, and he said. "Lord, I want that. Would you let me die like you? Would you let me be conformed unto Your death?"

A Most Excellent Reward

Ah, beautiful. Yes, it's true! Some day there's going to be a most excellent reward. We get a few little blessings here this side of glory, but the day will come when the rewards will flow like nothing you could even imagine. And what is that reward? If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

Now there again we think "What is he talking about? He's a Christian! He's been born again! He's going to be resurrected someday." Ah, but my friend, only if he's faithful to walk with God all of his days. Only if he's faithful. Listen to what he says. If by any means. I've studied that little phrase, and it means every means. I will exercise every means of grace that I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Paul was looking ahead to glory. Paul was looking ahead to heaven. Paul was looking ahead to a new body, to a Christ Who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself[15]. Paul was looking forward to the day

when he would get a new body and a full inheritance in Christ Jesus. That is a most excellent reward. That is something worth striving for. This stuff down here in this world will not mean anything!

Think about a man in a motor home. He's in the captain's chair, and then into a lawn chair, and back into the captain's chair, and back into the lawn chair. I saw a man rolling down the road in his big motor home, then I looked at heaven for a moment and I thought "Peanuts! Driving around in a peanut when you could have a mansion in Glory some day!" Now that's ludicrous! But I'm telling you brothers and sisters; we have been affected, and infected, by the spirit of this age. Somehow we think we can have heaven down here and then heaven over there also. It doesn't work that way, my friend. A most excellent reward, though, is coming. Hallelujah. Glory to God, it is coming! It'll be worth it all then. Are you willing to pay the price? Oh, I know, you were born again back there. It was beautiful, I know. But how is it now? How is it now, young man?

A Most Excellent Will and Purpose

I like this one. Hear him in verse 12. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after. Why, Paul? If that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. There is a most excellent will and purpose. God's will and God's purpose for my life should be my number one focus. That's the way it was with Paul. "I follow after. I want to apprehend!"

That word apprehend is a two fold word. It means to perceive and to possess. That's what apprehend is. "I want to perceive that which I was apprehended for. And not only do I want to perceive what I was apprehended for, I want to possess what I was apprehended for." That call is to every one of us. Every one of us has been called. Every one.

Do you know what the will and purpose of God is for your life? Are you apprehending that which you were apprehended for? Or are you just kind of floating along, friend? You know, you can float along. You can hitchhike for awhile, just going along for the ride. Good meetings, good atmosphere, lots of excitement, good things going on. Are you one of those hitchhikers, or are you apprehending the will and purpose of God for your own life? You'll never ever understand and know the will and purpose of God for your life until you come into good, clear, long contact with the God of heaven Who made you.

A most excellent will and purpose. That's all that made Paul's heart beat. Thirty years ago in Omaha, Nebraska, I was apprehended. No doubt about it. All my life since has been consumed with apprehending the will and purpose of God for my life. I lost my way here and there, it's true. Something just keeps calling you back into the center, back into the heat, back into the fire. Something keeps calling you. Do you know what it is? It's God! He has a most excellent reward waiting for you.

Are you apprehending the will and purpose of God for your life?

When you get filled with the revelation of God's will and purpose for your life, it will fill your life. You won't have time to fritter away on anything else! You just won't have time, bless God! We can fuss about the internet, and we can fuss about the computer, and we can fuss about the television. But when you get filled with the purpose of God you'll look at those things and say "Are you kidding me? I don't have time for that. That's chaff. Forget it. I'm not going to waste my time sitting in front of that thing. I'm not going to take two hours kicking a ball around a field and waste all my energies. I've got better things to do! I've been filled with the purpose of the living God. Go kick your balls. I've got better things to do."

You say, "That's kind of radical." Well, Paul was pretty radical too, wasn't he?

A Most Excellent Standard

Look at these verses. I get so excited about this chapter! Look at this. Verses 14 and 15. I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. We've been looking at the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Now listen what he says in verse 15. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded. What minded? All these nine points we've been looking at.

Are you here today, and you're perfect? And by the way, to be perfect means to be upright, to be clear, to be on the road to, and in, maturity. Are you perfect this morning? Then be thus minded. Don't let other things distract you from this. Be thus minded. This is the standard, brothers and sisters. And if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. There's the excellent standard. If you take that as your standard, ask God to somehow write it on the conscience of your heart. If in anything ye be otherwise minded, God will reveal it unto you, because God wants you to be thus minded. God will reveal it to you.

Then he goes on just to show you this is really His standard. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing. And then he finishes with this: Brethren, be followers together of me. And mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. Look at that. That is the most excellent standard. Paul says "This is the way I live, this is my passion, and this is what makes me tick. Follow me. And find anybody else there in the fellowship at Philippi who is thus minded, anybody who is just like this, mark them. Use them as an example and say 'I'm going to be like him. I'm going to do what he does. I want to do it the way he does it.'"

Are you ready for that? You say "Well, I'm going to have Christ, but I'm going to have fun too." You're not going to have Christ. Oh, you might be able to go to church, and you might be able to say all the right things, but remember that's just dung.

"I'm going to have my fun." "I'm going to get my truck. You wait until I get my truck." Yes, well, you get your truck. You just go get it, friend. You're not going to have Christ. Understand what I'm saying. There's nothing wrong with buying a truck, but if your heart is saying "Oh, I want one of those trucks, and those nice shiny wheels, and I want to roll down the road in that thing." You're not going to have Christ! I promise you! Just another idol, that's all. Out there polishing that thing and bowing down to it every Saturday.

What does it mean for a Christian, who's been a Christian for thirty years, to forsake all and follow Jesus? This is what it means: I must face and deal with anything that gets in my way of living like this. And so must you.

Christ, the most excellent Standard.

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