

Stages in the Pursuit of Christ

by Stephen Kaung

The pursuit of Christ is not just about knowing his work, but about knowing him and experiencing his power and character in our lives.

Duration: 1:14:00

Scripture: John 6:66

Topics: "Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of knowing Jesus Christ and the power of His resurrection. He explains that while many may focus on the death of Jesus as the means of salvation, it is through His resurrection that believers can truly know Him. The speaker references the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000 and how many followed Him for the wrong reasons, seeking temporary satisfaction. However, true believers understand that only Jesus has the words of eternal life and they are committed to following Him. The sermon also highlights the transformation of Saul of Tarsus, who encountered a revelation of Jesus on the road to Damascus and counted all his past achievements as loss in comparison to knowing Christ.

Transcript

Will you please turn to Philippians chapter 3. We will read from verse 10 through verse 14. Philippians chapter 3 verse 10. To know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings being conformed to his death.

If anyway I arrive at the resurrection from among the dead, not that I have already obtained the price or am already perfected, but I pursue if also I may take possession of it, seeing that also I have been taken possession of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not count to have got possession myself, but one thing for getting the things behind and stretching out to the things before. I pursue looking towards the goal for the price of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus.

May we have a word of prayer. Dear Lord, as we gather together here this morning, it is the cry of our heart that there is nothing between, between us and thyself. We pray that a light will search us.

Take away any darkness that may still be upon our heart. Oh Lord, shine, shine upon us. May the glory of the Lord not only fill this place, but fill our hearts.

Lord, we want to see thy glory and deliver us from all things. Thou art our treasure. Thou the one that we seek for.

Oh, feel us, oh Lord. Glorify thyself. We commit this time into thy loving hands.

We pray that thy spirit will break open thy living word and speak to each of our heart. Lord, we long to be thine. Holy thine.

Thine we serve it. May glory be unto thee. We ask in thy precious name.

Amen. We are sharing together all this matter on pursuing with passion. It is true that our life is a pursuit.

But it is very important that we know what we are pursuing after. For long we have been pursuing things under the sun. We think that these things will satisfy our life.

But thank God, gradually we discover, as Solomon said, vanity of vanities. All is vanity. There is nothing permanent, nothing eternal, nothing real, nothing last forever.

All our labors end in vanity. But thank God, by his grace, he opened our eyes as Saul of Tarsus, while he was on the way to Damascus, persecuting the church. He thought he was serving God.

He was building up his righteousness. That one day when he should appear before God, he would pass. But thank God, on the way to Damascus, a great light shone upon him, blinded his naked eyes, but opened up his inner eyes, he saw the Lord of glory.

That delivered him, turned him around from seeking the things under the sun, and really began to seek the things in heaven. He told us himself, when this light shone upon him, when this revelation was given to him, he began to count all things but loss. What he considered was gain in his past history, he now saw that it was all loss.

Worse than loss, it was filthy. And it is all because of the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ. From that hour, he began to pursue with real passion after Jesus.

And after his long experience of pursuing, he testifies to us. He shares with us his experience, what he had gone through, what he had discovered, what he had experienced of Christ Jesus. And this is something that we would like to fellowship together this morning.

So it will be the steps or the stages in our pursuit of Christ. We find that in verse eight, but surely I count also all things to be lost for the account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord, an account of whom I have suffered the loss of all and count them to be filled. Now, why did he do that? He said that I may gain Christ.

And as our brother mentioned last night, he put a qualifying clause behind it. What does he mean by gaining Christ? He said, and I may be found in him, not having my righteousness, which would be on the principle of law, but that which is by faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God through faith. In other words, when he began to see the Lord, he gained Christ.

What he considered as his own gain, the righteousness that he had accumulated through the years by keeping the law, the letter of the law. Now, through Christ Jesus, he got the real righteousness. Because his own righteousness is, as the Bible said, or as filthy rags that will not cover his nakedness.

We thought sometimes we were well dressed, covered before God. But actually, in the light of God, these are but rags. They cannot cover our nakedness before God.

And by gaining Christ, he gained the righteousness through Christ Jesus. To put it in another way, we say he got saved. And as soon as he got saved, he immediately set before him the goal, the mark.

And the mark is to know him. That is the pursuit of this young man, to know Christ. Now, dear brothers and sisters, this actually is a most important step.

When we are saved, what do we know of Christ? We know Christ Jesus as our savior. We know that he had died for us. We know that he had forgiven forgiven our sins.

We know that he had given us his own life, eternal life. We know that we are saved. We have gained him.

To put it in another way, we are profited by what he did on Calvary's cross for us. We are forever thankful for that. If ever we recall the day when we came to the Lord Jesus, we came as sinners destined for death.

No hope, no God. But when we came to him, we look at Calvary. We saw there he died.

He shed his blood for the remission of our sins. Our sins are all forgiven. The heavy load upon us was gone.

Peace reigned in our heart. Our relationship with God was resumed. We can lift up our heads and say, Abba, Father, we know the work of our Lord Jesus.

It is his work on Calvary's cross that saved us, deliver us from eternal death, and give us life. But brothers and sisters, even after we have been saved, in our mentality, it is still Christ for us. We still center upon his work, his death.

Now, we do not want to minimize his work, despise his death, because his work is the foundation, the basis of our salvation. We are ever thankful for what our Lord Jesus has done for us. But dear brothers and sisters, there is a danger.

And the danger is because we came to him by his work. So, we look to his work instead of himself. We want him to do this for us, to do that for us, to supply our every need.

We look him to bless us. We are still so self-centered, as if even Christ himself surrounds us. But we are the center.

We seek for his blessing, and everything is based upon his work, no doubt. And thank God for that. He did all things for us.

But brothers and sisters, if we make his work as the goal of our pursuit, then what will happen to our Christian life? We will be as the Corinthian believers. Believers. These Corinthian believers were corrupt morally, wise wordly, and thank God through Jesus Christ and him crucified, they were redeemed, they were saved.

But after they were saved, all they sought for from Christ is his work. Work this for me. Work this.

Work that. Give me this. Give me that.

Supply me. Support me. Bless me.

That's all they desired. And because of this, they remain as babes in Christ. You know, a baby is always an attraction to everybody.

Not only to the eyes of the parents, especially the grandparents, but in the eyes of everyone. Every baby is pretty. Every baby is, you see, is lovely.

But we have to remember, a baby is one who depends everything upon others. To put it in a bad way, a baby is the most selfish person in the world. Everything is for me.

Everybody is for me. And he cannot wait, as if he has right to everything. And brothers and sisters, although many believers today are like this, we look to Christ Jesus.

We believe in him. But what is our attitude towards him? Do this for me. Can't wait.

Right away. I'm the important person. And if we take that kind of pursuing, we will remain a selfish Christian.

We will remain babes in Christ. We will become carnal Christians. Thank God we are Christians.

But we are carnal Christians. We still live according to the flesh. To our flesh.

We live for ourselves. And Christ is for us. And thank God he is for us.

There must be one day when instead of seeking, depending only on the work of Christ, and be so self-centered, we begin to see. We want to know him. From his work, we are brought in.

And by his work, we want to know him. Not just enjoying what he has done for us, but we want to know him. What kind of a person he is.

What kind of a God whom we serve. We want to know his character. His real being.

And we want to follow him. We want to be like him. We want to fulfill his desire.

His purpose in us. And brothers and sisters, this will be a great day. You remember in John chapter 6, our Lord Jesus is always full of passion, compassion, and love.

How he used five loaves and two fishes to feed 5,000 people. Because he has compassion on them. And because of this, these people sought after him.

And our Lord Jesus said, you do not come to me because of me. You come to me because of bread. Labour not for the things that are decayed.

And then our Lord began to share with them. He said, your forefathers ate the manna from heaven. It was given by God, but they still died.

But if you eat me, if you drink of me, you will have eternal life. You will never die. And when people began to hear that, not only the people, but even many of his disciples.

In other words, many people are following him. But many of his disciples, they began to say, that's hard saying. We don't understand this.

And they left him. And then our Lord turned to his 12 disciples whom he had called, especially to himself, to be with him and to train them. And the Lord said, don't you also want to go? You're free to do that.

Thank God for Simon Peter. He said, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And we believe in you.

We know you are the son of brothers and sisters. They did come one day to you to realize that it is not what he did for you, but he is himself. He has the word of eternal life.

He is the son of God. We believe in him. We have nowhere to turn.

No one to follow. We are forever stuck with you. We are yours.

A. B. Simpson, the founder of the Christian Alliance, he wrote a hymn. It is called himself. He said, once I want a blessing.

Now I see the Lord. Once I sought for feeling. But now it is his word.

Once his gifts I wanted. But now the giver of once. I sought for healing.

But now himself. So, dear brothers and sisters, always you're seeking for something out of our Lord Jesus. Something of his works, of his blessing towards us, or are we seeking himself? We want to know him.

And to know him is eternal life. To know him is to know his character. To know him is to be transformed and to conform to his image.

To know him is to follow him. Do we really want to know him? Do we make him our goal, our mark? And it is to him that we pursue with passion. We will not turn aside.

We are willing to count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ. And brothers and sisters, when this desire is created in our hearts to know him, we are set on the right course. This is the beginning of real Christian life.

And to Paul, the apostle, through his long life of following the Lord, he shared with us his own experience. How from step to step, one step at a time, he pursued after Christ to win him. He said to know him and the power of his resurrection.

The first thing to know him is to know the power of his resurrection. Now, brothers and sisters, we often thought what we need to know is his death. Because it is his death on Calvary's cross that brings us into the family of God.

If our Lord Jesus came into this world, lived for 33 and a half years on earth, lived a perfect life, demonstrated to us what God is like, and then on that mount of figuration, he was lifted up and returned to heaven. Without going through death, what will happen to us? Even today there will be only one man in heaven. There will forever be one man.

But thank God, he came down from the mount of ascension, of transfiguration. He set his face to Jerusalem. He went to Calvary, and there he died for us.

It is his death that redeems us. It is his death that brings us into the family of God. So our emphasis is more on his death.

But brothers and sisters, as you read the New Testament, when you open the book of Acts, and you see when Peter and the eleven first preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, what is their emphasis? Their emphasis is, let you people of Israel know that the one whom you have crucified, God has raised him up from the dead, and he is now crowned, anointed as Lord and Christ. In other words, you find in the Bible, we are not clearly called to believe in the death of the Lord Jesus in order to be saved. Even though this is a truth, this is a fact, but what we are called to believe is not his death, but his resurrection.

When the early apostles preached the gospel, their emphasis was always on the resurrection of our Lord Jesus. You remember in Romans chapter ten, verse nine, it is said, if you believe in your heart, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and you believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you are saved. We are saved by believing that God has raised him from the dead, and we do confess him with our mouth.

And why is it so? Because if our Lord Jesus went to Calvary, and there he died, and if he never be raised again, how do we know that God has accepted his substitute? So, brothers and sisters, the gospel emphasizes on the resurrection of our Lord Jesus. It is by his resurrection that we receive life. So, the first thing to know about the Lord Jesus, after we have received the benefit of his death, is to know the power of his resurrection.

The Lord himself tells us, I am the resurrection and the life. In other words, the Calvary is his work. His death is his work.

But so far as he himself is concerned, he is life. He said, I'm the first and the last, the living one. Once I died, but I am living forever, and holding in my hands the keys of death and of Hades.

In other words, you'll find the Lord himself is not death. That is his work. The Lord himself is life.

He is the eternal life. He is the resurrection life. He has gone into death.

Raw death of his power. And come out in victory. This is the power of his resurrection.

And thank God, brothers and sisters, we who have believed in the Lord Jesus, we have his life in us. It is not a life of death. It is a life eternal.

And this life is powerful. There is nothing more powerful than resurrection life, because it overcomes even death. Now, who can overcome death? Once you are swallowed by death, you'll never come out.

But our Lord Jesus entered into death, overcome it, and come out in victory. And he holds in his hand the keys of death and Hades. So, in other words, the life that God has given to us in Christ Jesus is an overcoming life.

It is a life that is above everything. There is nothing that can conquer that life. And this power of resurrection life is in each and every one of us believers.

So, the first thing that we know our Lord Jesus himself is to experience the power of his resurrection. We are living in this hostile world. As we have mentioned before, once we belong to this world, and because we belong, therefore, it was easy.

But now, we do not belong to this world. We belong to our God, our Lord. So, living in this alien world, running against the current, is not an easy task.

Now, how can we, as believers, to live in this hostile world? We need power. The power of resurrection life. If our Lord Jesus should leave us on this earth as orphans, we have to fight our own ways.

We have no chance. But thank God, he gave us life, resurrection life in us. And he's proving to us that his life in us is more than able to overcome every obstacles, every trials, every tribulations.

No Christian can live on this earth by himself. The only way we can live on this earth is by the power of his resurrection. Is it not true in our own experience? After we believe in the Lord Jesus, we try to overcome temptations.

We try very hard. We even pray very hard. But the more we try and pray, the less we are able to overcome.

Why? Because no Christian can live a Christian life by himself or herself. It is a time for us to wake up, to see that we cannot live a Christian life. But thank God, we can.

Because we have the power of his resurrection in us. If we really turn to him in all things, there is nothing above us, but all things will be under. So, the first thing to know him is to know his life.

That's knowing him, not just knowing his teaching. You know, sometimes we who have been Christian for years, we have heard a lot, and unfortunately, we read a lot. We know a lot, but that doesn't help us.

That does not make us grow in Christ. Only when we experience his life, the power of his resurrection life, then brothers and sisters, we begin to really know him. I believe, brothers and sisters, more or less every one of us here who have believed in the Lord Jesus, in some way, maybe a small way, we have some experience of the resurrection life, of the power of resurrection in our lives.

But unfortunately, we still lead upon ourselves, and that is our problem. If only we can know the power of his resurrection. And this we have to know by experience.

Maybe after many failures, when a try comes, we know it is wrong. We try to fight against it. We put our whole force against it.

We pray very hard, but it doesn't work. And after many failures, we begin to remember that we have a life with us who is able to know the power of his resurrection. That is knowing him because he is life.

And then the second step is to know the fellowship of his sufferings. You notice the word suffering is in plural number. In other words, there are a number of kinds of sufferings.

To put it simply, there are two kinds of the sufferings of Christ. One, we call it vicarious suffering. And that is when our Lord Jesus, bearing our sins upon his body, and there he was crucified on the cross.

He went to the wine press, as it were, all by himself. He bore the wrath of God overseen all by himself. And because of what he did for us, we are atoned, we are redeemed, we are saved.

And this kind of suffering, no one could share with you. No one is qualified to have any part in that kind of suffering. We only reap the fruit of that suffering.

Thank God for that. But there is another kind of suffering, which we call it non-vicarious suffering. And that is a suffering that he calls us to have fellowship with him.

Now, fellowship simply means sharing the same with him. As he has suffered, so we will suffer with him. And what are these sufferings? For instance, when our Lord Jesus came into this world, the one thing that he suffered was obedience to his father.

He was a man having his own will. Even though he was sinless, and yet he has his will. But our Lord Jesus throughout his life, never for a moment, he will follow his own will.

He was always waiting for the will of the father. And he was obedient to it. He told us himself, I cannot do anything by myself.

I cannot say anything on my own. My time is not mine. Everything is the father who sent him.

He came here to do the will of the father. And whatever the father said, he said. Whatever the father did, he did.

Whatever the father's time was his time. Do you think it is easy? It is very hard for us to be obedient to God. We want this, we want that.

We want to be free. We want to have our own opinion, our own way. We choose ourselves.

In obedience, there involve sufferings. Your flesh will suffer. You have to deny yourself.

Withhold yourself. Put yourself to death. Before you can really be obedient.

And our Lord Jesus was obedient. To the father, even to death, and that the death of the cross. You remember when he was in the garden of Gethsemane? How he prayed, Lord, deliver me from this cup.

But if it is thy will, may thy will be done. Not my will, but thy will be done. As the perfect man, sinless man, the cleanest man on earth, to put all the sins of the world upon him.

All the dirt, filth upon him. That was unbearable. So far as human nature is concerned.

But he said, not my will, but thy will be done. He drank the brothers and sisters. This is a kind of suffering that he calls us to follow, to share with him.

Do you find it is hard to deny your own will and to do the will of another? Is it not our pride being hurt? Who am I to listen? I can do anything that I want to. This is self, but brothers and sisters, a Christian life is a life of obedience. The Lord Jesus said, deny yourself.

Take up your cross and follow me. Juke with me. I'm meek and lowly.

Learn and you will find rest in your soul. The Lord wants us to fellowship with him. You know, brothers and sisters, today's Christianity tells us, Christ has suffered for us.

Therefore, we do not need to suffer. Suffering is a foreign word to Christians today. We think that if we believe in the Lord Jesus, there will be no suffering, only blessing.

But if you read the word of God, this is not so. The word of God is full of suffering. As our Lord Jesus suffered for the will of God, so we also must suffer.

Is that thought, that mindset ever comes to us? Why is it that we rebel against God? We murmur against God. We don't want to suffer. We want to be blessed.

We think that we believe in the Lord Jesus is for this reason. He has suffered all that we need not suffer anymore. Brothers and sisters, not that kind of suffering.

Obedience. Have you ever suffered in obedience to the will of God? If you do, you know him. That's what he is.

That is his character. That is his life. Not only that, but when our Lord Jesus was on earth, he suffered for righteousness sake.

The world is wicked. The world is full of unrighteousness. If you want to live a righteous life in this unrighteous world, you have to suffer.

And that's the reason why our Lord Jesus, while he was on earth, he suffered so much. He suffered the opposition of the scribes, the Pharisees, those in authority, because he refused to do anything that was not right in the sight of God. Do we ever suffer with him for righteousness sake? Are we taking the easy way? Try to mingle with the world and escape any suffering.

It is a real trial to believers today. But if you want to know him, you have to know his righteousness and to suffer. What misunderstanding, what persecution, even unto death to our Lord Jesus.

And the same thing will happen to those who follow him and learn of him. So there are many, many things. Our Lord Jesus suffered for the sake of the church.

How he travailed, how out of his sight, throughout blood and water, to build the church. And we who follow the Lord, as the Apostle Paul said, I travail. Travail for the church.

To see that a church is being built. Do we suffer for that? Or do we think the church is a place of pleasure? Our Lord Jesus suffered for his sympathy, his passion, compassion towards the world. Whenever a person suffers, he suffers.

Are we like that? Do we really take upon ourselves the character of our Lord Jesus? And that is knowing. Sometimes we wonder why. Why is it the first thing we know is the power of his resurrection.

And then we know the fellowship of his suffering. I think now we know. Because unless we know the power of his resurrection, we have no way to fellowship with his suffering.

Thank God he has provided. A Christian life is not a life left to ourselves. A Christian life is a calling.

And with that calling, he has already supplied the power. So by the power of his resurrection life, we are able to share with him in his suffering. Today people look at suffering as foreign to Christian.

A Christian should not suffer. So what kind of Christianity do we have today? The way of the cross is narrow. Few have found it, but it leads.

So brothers and sisters, this is true Christianity. This is really knowing Christ. And are we ready for it? Then you find being conformed to his death.

Now is not his death brings us life already? It is by his death that our sins are atoned. It is to die with Christ on the cross that we will live in Christ today. But here you find we are to be conformed to his death.

You remember in Romans chapter 12 verse 2. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may be able to prove what is the good and perfect acceptable will of God. Brothers and sisters, once we were conformed to this world. The world is like a mold and we all were conformed in that mold.

And out of that mold we come out the same. But God has delivered us out of this world. And has transformed us into the kingdom of the son of his love.

And you find that our Lord's death is also a mold. It is more than just he died for us. But it is a mold and we are to be conformed into that mold.

What does it mean? It means only one thing. That his death put everything that is outside of God to death. Is it not true that in our lives even after we have believed in the Lord, there are still many things in us that are not of God.

Some may be of sin. Some may be of the world. Some may be of ourselves.

Some may be even from the enemy. And anything that is not of God died in the death. And we are to be conformed into that death.

And only after we are conformed to that death that we will be transformed and conformed to the image. As the apostle Paul says, death, I daily die. Death works in us.

That life may work in us and in other people. This is the way of Christian life. And the apostle Paul is pursuing step by step.

Experiencing all these things. But even so, he said, if anyway. In other words, he is not so sure.

Not so confident. He said, if anyway, I may arrive at the out resurrection from among the dead. Now, brothers and sisters, we have to remember that the resurrection, the word resurrection here is not the just the word resurrection.

In the original Greek, it is out resurrection. You know, in the Bible, we are told that all who believe in the Lord Jesus, who have died at the coming of the Lord, when the trumpet shall sound and the Lord shall return. Then the dead who died in the Lord Jesus will all be raised and be changed and put on incorruptibility.

And they will all be taken up to the air to meet the Lord in the air. That is the resurrection of the just. And the resurrection of the unjust will wait until thousand years later.

But here you'll find it is out resurrection. In other words, with Paul, arrive at resurrection of the dead. It's sure.

The Lord Jesus said, I'm the resurrection, resurrection in the light. He who believes in me and died, he shall live again. There is nothing to be hoping for.

It is sure. But why is it Paul said that I may arrive at the rest out resurrection from among the dead? Because the Bible tells us there is a resurrection which is called first resurrection. You'll find that in Revelation chapter 20.

What is first resurrection? First resurrection is out resurrection. It is not another resurrection because all resurrection of the just will come together. But out of the resurrection, there will be some whose resurrection is out resurrection.

It's first resurrection. Now, what is the difference? The difference is those who have part in that out resurrection, they will reign with Christ for a thousand years. You'll find that in Revelation chapter 20.

And that is what Paul is looking for. Who will come to this out resurrection? Only those who know him. The power of his resurrection, the fellowship of his suffering, conformed to his death.

And these are the people who may arrive at the out resurrection from among the dead. It is the time to receive the prize of the high calling that God had caused in Christ Jesus. Brothers and sisters, so even with apostle Paul, he said, I do not say I have arrived.

He wrote this letter when he was in Roman prison. He said, I do not say I have arrived. I forget the things that are behind me and stretching myself out with all my effort towards the mark I pursue.

Dear brothers and sisters, this should be our attitude. Do not come to a time when you sit down and said, that's enough. I have arrived.

You haven't. Not until when Paul wrote second Timothy, before his martyrdom, then he had assurance. I have run the course.

I have fought the good fight. I have kept the faith. And now the crown of righteousness was waiting for me.

And not only for me, but for all who desire his return. Brothers and sisters, are we waiting for the return of the Lord? Are we ready for his return? If we pursue with passion by the grace of God, he will enable us. But if we abuse the grace of God, we have to weep in utter darkness.

May the Lord have mercy to us. Shall we pray? Dear Lord, thou has shown us the way to know thee. We have, we thank and praise thee because thou know the way is the way of the cross.

We thank thee that thou has already prepared, provided for us, thy resurrection and life. Christ in you, the hope of glory. Oh, we thank thee for the mystery of the gospel.

We pray that each and every one of us here by thy grace will pursue stretching out towards the mark until we hear thy voice. Good and faithful servant, come into the joy of the Lord. We give thee glory in thy precious name.

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