

Introduction

- When you think of a **good Christian**, a real enthusiast, what do you think of?
 - **what is the picture that comes to mind?**
- I wonder if it might include some of the **following elements?**
 - someone who has **grown up with the faith**, born into a household where church was simply part of the normal routine of life, and who has taken that rhythm on-board;
 - someone whose background and upbringing has left them with a **wide-ranging knowledge of the Bible**, people, places, incidents...;
 - someone who as child was pretty well behaved, and whose adult life is apparently **upright** and free of scandal;
 - someone whose life was marked by their **involvement with the church and other Christian organisations** - a SS teacher, a leader of youth groups, a regular at the prayer meeting, ...;
- I wonder if you'd be extra specially sure of the depth of that person's commitment if you also knew that:
 - they were not only born into a Christian family, but a **child of the manse**;
 - that they themselves had decided to go into (what is called) **the ministry**;
- Those are all external marks of a Christian, things people looking on would see and say "**Yip - they are a Christian**".
 - if anyone could say they were a Christian, it would surely be such a person!
 - and none of those things are bad of themselves
 - at least I hope not, since so many of them apply to me!!
- **But none of those things make me a Christian:**
 - none of those things, or even more of the same kinds of things, can make you a Christian
- As a young teenager, with all of the advantages that I had, I suddenly knew the fear of the fate Paul describes in v.19 "**They are going to end up in hell**".
 - all my upbringing, all my good-behaviour and upright living, all my uprightness, none of that could or did take away the fear of death, the fear of its consequences - the fear that sin can generate in a heart before a the Holy God
- All that I could have counted to my profit I was forced to count as nothing, as a loss.
 - **spiritually, those things didn't get me anywhere**

Paul's Starting Point

- **That was exactly the same place that Paul**, who later wrote this letter to the Philippians, **found himself on the road to Damascus**.
- He was a **good Jew**, born into the very **best of families**, and himself **zealous for God's honour**.
 - in fact, he was so zealous for God's honour that he spent his time persecuting the heretical sect that, in his eyes, the early church was
- He thought he was helping God's cause; **he was trying to please God!**
 - but what he discovered was that rather than pleasing God, all his efforts had merely dug him into an even deeper hole;
 - he was, in fact, persecuting the Lord Jesus Christ, the very Son of God - "**Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?**"
 - he found himself doing things, hoping they would please God, that he would find favour in God's eyes, only to find that his actions were abhorrent in God's eyes!
- Not simply that he was persecuting the church, but also that he was trying to buy favour with God through his actions.
 - how abhorrent - I tried to get a feel of how such an approach sticks in God's throat, and all I could come up with was the feeling of being soiled, of being dirty by association, that would come over you if someone tried to buy a favour from

you, **tried to bribe you!**

- **Paul was trying to buy God's favour** - an abhorrent action - but an instinctive action by a sinner in the face of a Holy God!
- and we are all sinners...
- That spark of evil - that drove the upright, zealous, scrupulously moral Saul to persecute the church of God - that spark smoulders within us all:

Story

- US service man; at end of WW2; liberation of one of the Nazi concentration camps; repelled by the evil he found... clearing corpses from sheds, finding some skeletal ones still alive... hated all that he saw; a volunteer was asked for to escort some SS officers to be interrogated elsewhere on the site; one of the other soldiers volunteered; with machine gun in hand herded SS officers off through the trees; shortly afterwards the stutter of machine gun; came back: **"they all tried to escape"**

- justice? Perhaps. But same seed of evil that was in the SS officers, was in the soldier who exacted revenge - **and, says the service man who tells the tale, inside himself** - would **he** not, in rage at the horrors he saw around him, also have machine gunned those SS officers if it had been him escorting them through the woods?

- And so we find ourselves evil at heart, and unable to do anything about it - unable to buy favour with God, for we are unclean and the very act of attempting such a transaction is itself abhorrent to God!
- We do face that prospect of hell - of eternity separated from God, with all good removed from us, all enjoyment, all friendship, all company, all beauty, all comfort - for they all derive from our loving, Creator God

An Upside Down Kingdom

- But praise God, his is an upside down Kingdom!
- As Paul says, v.3, we do not put any trust in external ceremonies, in the things we are by background, or up-bringing, the things we can do or achieve - the obvious things, the clearly profitable things.
- Rather our whole trust and confidence is not on those profitable things, but on Jesus Christ - on knowing him, and on the righteousness (rightness before God) that he **gives**.
- all our attendance at church, all our Scripture knowledge, all our uprightness and decency, they are all rubbish, garbage
- Only faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord counts
- It may be that you have realised that for the first time.
- Don't let moment pass - get to know Christ!
- it's as simple as asking him to help you, to save you, to be your Lord and Saviour: **"Lord, I want to know you, I want to follow you"**
- Grab the opportunity - I don't mind if you don't listen in to the rest of the sermon this evening because you are praying quietly to God!

Paul's Lifestyle

- Empty handed on the Damascus road was where Paul started his Christian life:
- and empty handed was where he would have us start our lives of faith too
- But Paul did not stay standing on the starting line:
- Paul did not merely enter this new kingdom, this upside down kingdom of God's, and stand just inside the gates, just over the border, just beside Passport control!
- **Paul was determined to live his life by the upside down standards of God's Kingdom!**
- And so he wanted always and only to know Jesus Christ, always and only to be dependent on him and serving him
- This attitude, this approach was not merely for the beginning of his life as a follower of Jesus, but for the whole of it, all the way through.

- Have a look at verses 10 & 11:
 - *"All I want is to know Christ and to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings and become like him in his death, in the hope that I myself will be raised from death to life."*
- If you explore the Greek a bit, the first "and" carries a bit more force - could better be translated "namely" - ie explaining what that knowing Christ means!
 - *"All I want is to know Christ: namely, to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings and become like him in his death, in the hope that I myself will be raised from death to life."*
- Three aspects then to knowing Christ that Paul identifies here:
 - 1. To know the power of his resurrection**
 - To know that new life, the new birth that comes as we trust in Jesus Christ alone as Saviour - and keep trusting him, day by day, for that new life - and to experience his power bring new life and hope to old, tired and hopeless situations
 - 2. To share in his sufferings**
 - Christ suffered - so also will Christians suffer - physically, abuse or ridicule, or the cold shoulder and shunning of our perspective that is so common today;
 - As we suffer, we do so alongside Christ, knowing that he understands, and ever hopeful that the God of the upside down kingdom can bring good from bad, profit from loss, joy out of sorrow.
 - 3. To become like him in his death**
 - In his death, Jesus died to sin; it no longer had any hold on him, he had resisted to the point of death.
 - Paul's hope is that he too would increasingly die to sin, kill off its power in his life through self-discipline, through obedience to God's commandments - and all in the power that God alone gives.
- Paul's aim and hope was always to live solely to know Jesus Christ, solely to rely on him, to become increasingly like him.
- Paul sought not the apparent profit of upright living for its own sake, or the apparent gain of respectability and uprightness:
 - rather he desired the "loss" of abandoning himself to Jesus Christ, utterly and totally, knowing that God is no man's debtor, and that he will call us home to win the prize, to be with him above.

Conclusion

- **Come into this upside down kingdom!**
 - perhaps the thing that most distresses me as a minister, in all the situations I have had to deal with, is being with a grieving family who tell me that the person who died was a good person - and just sometimes you can hear that what they are really looking for is reassurance that **"being a good person"** is enough, has kept their loved one safe into eternity... and I can't help them.
 - only God knows the state of that person's heart, only God knows whether that person had trusted Him for salvation, and not in their own deeds.
- So don't you live on the outside of God's upside down kingdom.
 - Come in - **and live with its upside down values!**
 - Come in - **and count as loss everything which does not draw you closer to Jesus Christ!**
- Come in - **and live as a citizen of heaven**, eagerly awaiting our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, gladly counting as loss all that does not bring us closer to Jesus, that does not bring us deeper knowledge of him, intimacy with him.