

The Truth About Fulfilment - *Philippians 3*

Introduction:

- Who here has ever played two truths and a lie? It's a pretty popular kind of "get to know you" game.
- For example, if I were to tell you three random facts about myself, "I have a heart shaped scar on my finger that I got from a cheese grater", "I have eaten a whale", and "I was cast in a commercial when I was 6 years old"...
- Those are three random facts, two of them things are true, one of them is a lie, and your job would be to figure out which of those things is untrue. I'm not actually going to tell you which of those things is untrue, but if you have a guess you can come ask me later.
- But the point of the game is to make it as challenging as possible, that as you look at those three things, it's supposed to be really difficult to figure out which one of them is a lie. The goal is to fool you.
- And often in our everyday lives, with all of the messages we hear in the world around us, it can feel the same as playing a big game of two truths and a lie, we're all just trying to sort through all the different messages that we're being told to figure out what's true, and what's not.
- And that's why we've titled this new series that we're starting today "*Two Lies and a Truth*".
- Because as we think about all of the messages that we hear from the world around us, it feels like rather than trying to find the one lie amongst the truth, there's so many different lies and conflicting messages that we're trying to sort through, and we're just trying to find the one real truth in the midst of all of that.
- But the good news in all of that, and the reason that we're doing this series is that we don't have to figure it all out on our own. We've been given an incredible gift to help us see the truth in the midst of all the lies we hear around us.
- Psalm 119, while being the longest chapter in the entire Bible, gives some beautiful descriptions of God's Word, and one of my favourite verses is V. 105, which says,

"Your word is a lamp to my feet

and a light to my path." - *Psalm 119:105 (ESV)*

- We don't just have to stumble around in the dark, guessing at what the truth is and hoping to get it right. In God's Word there are answers for every question we could have, so our goal in

this series is to look at some of the messages that we often hear in the World around us, then take some time to see what God's Word has to say about them.

- And we're starting off with looking at the passage that we just read from Philippians 3. We're going to be looking at bits and pieces of the entire chapter, but focusing specifically on V. 1-11.
- As we get into our passage today, I want you to consider this: what does the "perfect life" look like? Think of someone who's got everything that anyone could want in life and is truly happy and fulfilled. What does that person look like? Your answer to that question may change based on our background, culture, history, personality, etc... There's so many different factors that play into what we think a "fulfilled or secured life" looks like.
- It's an important question for each of us to consider. Where do we find our fulfillment and security in this world?
- It's a question that we all ask in one way or another, and our culture tries to give us so many different answers to that question.
- Here in Toronto, that kind of "fulfilled life" may look like having lots of money and a good career. If you have a high up, well paying job, that pays you enough money to do whatever you want, then you've "done it". You've got what our culture would consider "a fulfilled life".
- And so as we start this new series together today, our focus is going to be considering some of the different lies that we hear from the world around us about where fulfillment, and security can be found, and about what we really need in life.
- And as we get into our passage today, Paul begins Philippians 3 with some words of encouragement to the church:

"Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you." - Phil. 3:1 (ESV)

- He then immediately follows up this encouragement with a warning the church to be on guard, to "look out for the dogs, and evildoers." Essentially, look out for those who would try to lead the church away from the truth, away from "rejoicing in the Lord" as he's just encouraged them, and into a lie, and as we look through this chapter together, we'll begin to see more and more what some of those lies are.

The world tells us to find our fulfillment in anything other than Christ

- So that's where we start this chapter, with an encouragement to "Rejoice in the Lord", then immediately a warning to be on guard against anyone who tries to tell us otherwise.

- Paul recognizes the need to be reminding the church of these things, because he knows that there are those who are trying to pull them in different directions. He knows the church is hearing lies, and wants to make sure he's reminding them of what the truth really is.
- And this warning is just as important for us today as it was for the church then, to be on guard against the kinds of false security, and false fulfillment that the world tries to give us, because just like the Philippians were hearing lies from the world around them, we have a lot of the same lies being told to us today, just perhaps in some different ways.
- So what we're going to do is to look briefly at two lies that Paul mentions which the church was being told about where to find their fulfillment and security. And again, these are lies that we still hear in our world today.
- Then we're going to take some time to see where Paul tells us true fulfillment and security can be found.

Lie #1: You can find fulfillment and security in yourself, and your own righteousness

- The first lie that Paul addresses, and the one he spends the most time with is introduced in the warning he gives in V. 2.

“Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh” - Phil. 3:2 (ESV)

- What Paul is talking about here, is something we saw a few weeks back when we looked at a passage from Ephesians, that there was a group of people that would teach that in order to please God, you had to follow the Jewish law perfectly.
- They would teach that your position in God's eyes was based on your performance, and that if you weren't following every Old Testament law to the letter, specifically for the Gentiles if they weren't being circumcised, then their faith was invalid.
- And Paul is being a little bit clever in how he words this verse, specifically when he calls them “*dogs*”, that was a derogatory term that they would have used themselves to describe the gentiles, and when he calls them “*those who mutilate the flesh*”, he's referring to their insistence on circumcision.
- The most important thing for this group of people was perfect religious observance.
- And Paul sums up what these people were teaching as “*putting confidence in the flesh*”.
- That's the first lie, that we can find fulfillment and security in ourselves and our own righteousness.
- That if you just do the right things, say the right things, and avoid doing anything wrong, then you'll be set.

- And we've heard messages like this, haven't we? We often act as if life works like this scale that's constantly shifting based on how we act. If you just do enough good, follow all the rules, then you'll be good, but if you ever mess up and do something wrong, suddenly you're in huge trouble. You are responsible for your own salvation and it's all about doing enough good to outweigh the bad.
- Now those that Paul is talking about in this passage believed that their own efforts and righteousness could outweigh their sin, and that they could please God and be accepted by him by just doing enough good things, but I think that you even see this lie taught so often today even disconnected from any religious implications and trying to please God, messages like "you're enough". "you do you", and just try to be a good person and be "true to yourself", just follow your heart, everything you need is inside of yourself and no one can tell you any different.
- We put so much emphasis on ourselves, that we can find fulfillment and security within ourselves.

Lie #2: You can find fulfillment and security in the things of this world

- So that's the first lie that we see in this passage, that fulfillment and security is found in ourselves, but there's another lie that Paul addresses in this chapter, and it's one that we hear just as often, if not more in the world around us, and it's kind of on the opposite side of the spectrum from the first.
- If our culture isn't telling us to find our fulfillment and security in ourselves, and our own efforts, where are we told to look?
- We're told to look at the world around us. This whole idea of "eat, drink, and be merry". Find as much enjoyment and fulfillment as you can in the things of this world, money, possessions, relationships, fame, and the list goes on and on. You've only got one life, so make sure you live it to the fullest.
- If we're not told to look for fulfillment and security "*in here*", we're told to look for it "*out there*".
- Paul spends most of his time in this chapter on the first lie, but later in Ch. 3 you can see this was also an issue for the Philippian church. In V. 18 he mentions those who had lost sight of Christ and the Gospel, and in V. 19 he gives a fairly blunt description of what caused them to lose sight of Christ, and where it will lead them.

"Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things." - Phil. 3:19 (ESV)

- These people have walked away from Christ “*with minds set on earthly things*”.
- So that’s the second lie that this passage deals with, that you can find fulfilment and security in the things of this world.
- And again, this is a message that we see everywhere in our world.
- The entire marketing and advertising industry is built on the idea that we have needs that we want met. So if you buy this product, or sign up for that service, then you’ll be happy. Because those things will meet your needs.
- I can’t tell you how many commercials I’ve seen where someone is living some glum, boring life, with muted colours and sad music... until they try whatever product is being advertised, then suddenly the screen explodes with colour, the music switches to something upbeat, and the person is now all smiles, surrounded by friends, looking like the most popular person on the planet. The obvious message that’s being sold there is “if you buy our product, you will get the life you’ve always wanted.”
- That’s the promise of our culture. All you need is one more thing, or one more experience to have the perfect life you’ve always wanted.
- But Paul makes it incredibly clear where that leads. He says “*their end is destruction*”.
- No matter how many things or experiences you accumulate, the message of the world never changes. You always need something else. You always need more.
- The things of this world can never fulfil, and they can never give us the security or fill the true needs that we have in life.
- Because frankly we all have a desperate need that goes a lot deeper than just having more “stuff”. And it’s a need only one thing could ever fill.

True fulfilment can only ever be found in knowing Christ

- So those are the lies that we hear from the world around us, we’re told to look for our fulfilment and security in anything other than Christ.
- We’re told to look at ourselves and our own efforts, or we’re told to look outward to the things of this world.
- But I want to take some time now to consider how Paul responds to the lies that the church was encountering. Because like I said in the beginning, we don’t just have to stumble around in the dark, trying to make sense of these lies on our own.
- From Paul’s personal experience as he talks a bit about himself in this passage, he focuses primarily on the first lie, which is that anyone could find fulfilment and security in themselves, or their own efforts.

- For Paul, in the eyes of the culture around him, he would have been about as secure as anyone could be in their own righteousness. He says in V. 4,

“I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also.” - Phil. 3:4a (ESV)

- He then continues on to say,

“If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more” - Phil. 3:4b (ESV)

- And he goes into a lot of detail in the next few verses, describing what that confidence looked like for him.
- He talks about his life as a pharisee, how he fulfilled the law about as perfectly as anyone could. He describes himself as *“a Hebrew of Hebrews”*, and says that *“as to righteousness under the law, [he was] blameless”*.
- As far as the culture around him was concerned, Paul was perfect. Like he says, if anyone thinks they would have reason to be confident in themselves, Paul had them beat. He had the “perfect fulfilment and security” that the world around him would have told him that he needed.
- Paul describes himself as being at that place in life that we’re all trying to get to, where the world around us would look at us and think “man. they’ve got everything. They’ve got their lives completely together”.
- But look at what Paul says about all of his credentials, and all of his righteousness in V. 7-8
- Whatever gain he had, he counts as loss. He considers all of it *“rubbish”*, literally, all of his accomplishments that would have made him perfect in the eyes of the world around him, seem like garbage to him.
- And the most important thing to see in this passage is *why*. Why did Paul count all of his righteousness and accomplishments as loss and rubbish. Look at the rest of V. 7,

“But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.” - Phil. 3:7 (ESV)

- Then V. 8,

“Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ” - Phil. 3:8 (ESV)

- *“The surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus”*. That is the truth amongst all the lies.

- Every promise that the world makes to you, every source of fulfillment and security that you're offered, is worth nothing compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord. That is where true fulfillment, and true security can be found.
- I want you to think about the two lies that we just mentioned.
- The lies that fulfillment and security can be found within yourself and your own efforts, or out there in the things of this world.
- What do either of these messages give you that truly lasts? What eternal value do they have?
- At the end of the day, what will all of your worldly possessions give you?
- At the end of the day, what will all of your righteousness and efforts get you?
- The answer? Both of these lies give you nothing. Paul makes clear in V. 19 that for all those who walk as enemies of the cross of Christ, and are not found in him, *"their end is destruction"*.
- But knowing Christ... Jesus Christ does for us what nothing else ever could. He fills the one true need that we have, the need for a saviour.
- V. 9-11 are so wonderful as Paul describes what comes from knowing Christ:

"and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead." - Phil. 3:9-11 (ESV)

- That's the beautiful end that is awaiting those who know Christ, and find their fulfillment and security in him.
- And Paul makes it clear that since coming to know Christ, it has completely transformed the direction and purpose of his life, and where he looks for his fulfillment and security.

"I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." - Phil. 3:14 (ESV)

- For Paul, he had every reason in the eyes of his culture to find security and fulfillment in himself, but rather than putting his confidence in himself, he puts his confidence in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, in the surpassing worth of knowing Christ as Lord, and lives his life faithfully pressing on through any suffering, toward the goal of spending eternity with Jesus Christ, his Lord.
- Knowing Christ is the only thing that can ever give you eternal security and fulfillment.

- And he applies this truth directly to both of the lies that we see in this passage, showing directly how the truth of the Gospel is so much greater than any lie that our world tries to tell us.
- In V. 2 Paul gives his warning to look out for those who would try to lead the church astray to put confidence in themselves, then in V. 3, he says:

“For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh” - Phil. 3:3 (ESV)

- We worship by the Spirit of God, and glory in Christ Jesus.
- There is no need to try to put our confidence in the flesh, or find fulfilment and security in our own efforts or righteousness, because in Christ we are given a righteousness from God that depends on faith, not our own efforts, like he says in V. 9.
- Then in V. 20-21 he shows how knowing Christ is so much greater than finding fulfilment in the things of this world. He mentions those who have lost sight of the Gospel, then follows it up with these words,

“But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.” - Phil. 3:20-21 (ESV)

- Again showing that we don't put our confidence, or find our fulfilment in earthly things because in knowing Christ, we are able to know the power of his resurrection, and live our lives to press on towards to goal of eternity spent with him.
- No matter what messages this world tries to tell you, true fulfilment can only ever be found in the surpassing worth of knowing Christ.

Conclusion:

- Now as we end, I want to ask you a question.
- We've considered two different kind of lies that we hear from the world around us, so which of these lies do you find yourself believing most often? Each of us is probably prone to focus more on one rather than the other, and we all desperately need the reminders that this passage gives.
- I know for myself, I am much more prone to believe the lie that my security and my fulfilment comes from my own efforts and righteousness.

- I need this passage to remind me that putting my faith in my own righteousness will get me nothing, and I need to be putting my faith in the righteousness that I have been given by knowing Christ Jesus as Lord.
- I need this passage to remind me to focus on the truth rather than a lie.
- Because compared to the beautiful truth of the Gospel, and the surpassing worth of knowing Christ, you can truly see the lies of this world for what they are.
- Compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ, all of the security and fulfillment that we find in ourselves, or the things of this world, truly are rubbish.
- The world will make us lots of promises, but it will never be able to deliver.
- So be on guard.
- Be on guard against those who will tell you to try to find fulfillment and security in yourself, and in your own efforts.
- Be on guard against those who will tell you to try to find fulfillment and security in the promises of the things of this world.
- True fulfillment and security is never found in ourselves, or in the things of the world. It is only ever found in knowing Christ.
- And if you have never known the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord, I want to challenge you to consider what you look to to find your fulfillment and security, and really wrestle through Paul's words in this passage.
- To know Christ is such an amazing gift, and it's a gift that is available to anyone who would turn from their sin and trust him as saviour. It's a gift that's available to you today if you'll accept it.
- Because knowing Christ is the only thing that will ever be able to give you the fulfillment and security that you're searching for.
- Remember the words of Paul from this passage, and know that these words are true,

“Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” - Phil. 3:8a (ESV)