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Global Perspectives: Success and Sacrifice

Philippians 3:7-14

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In the late 1970s, John and Betty Anderson** answered the call of God to serve overseas. They took a major step of faith, moving with their two little girls to a country in Central Asia. They had no idea what the future would hold. John discovered a great area of need in the area of eye care, so this farmer began to train himself to become an optician. It would become their platform to love and help the people in that country. About a year later they moved to a city near the border of another country to help with the medical needs in that area. But not long after, all hell began to break loose.

Radical and violent Muslims stormed and overran the US Embassy in the neighboring country. Fifty-two Americans were attacked and held hostage. There was great concern that the violence would engulf their country as well so their field leader chartered a plane and flew out to the city where they were living to get this young family out. When he showed up unannounced, he was surprised to find them hesitant to leave. They told him they believed God had called them to that place and they wanted to stay. Now I'd assume that any well-thinking leader would see this as a moment to lead, telling this well-meaning but naïve young couple that they needed to go. Well, this leader led, but not necessarily in the way you might think. He said to John and Betty, "Let's pray, and let's ask God what He wants to do." That leader spent the entire night in prayer. When he came back the next morning, he joined the Andersons in declaring that he believed God wanted them to stay. And by faith, they did!

Sure enough, shortly thereafter things exploded in their city. Within weeks, war broke out in their country and violence erupted in their streets. Angry mobs began publicly hanging anyone with perceived connections to the foreigners who had invaded their country. As the only foreigners in their city, the Anderson's lives were in grave danger. As the mobs moved through the streets, it was actually their neighbors who protected them. Then, in the midst of the chaos, for some reason their young daughter went out and invited all the women from their neighborhood to come to their home—and they came! And Betty Anderson sat in amazement as she had the opportunity to share the love of Jesus Christ in a way she never could have imagined. Many of those women responded!

Shortly after, many men were knocking at the door. They were angry! The Andersons were terrified! The men rebuked the Andersons for what they had done with the women—but not for the reason you might suspect. They said, "In our culture, when there is something important to be told, you tell the men first!" The next thing you know, their home is filled with Muslim men who sat in rapt attention as John Anderson shared the Good News of Jesus Christ! None of that would have happened if they had left. It was their faith—their trust in God—and their assurance of His calling that allowed them to be used of God in extraordinary ways.

That was just the beginning. For thirty-three years, John and Betty Anderson loved and served the people of that country and raised three daughters in the midst of constant war-torn and horrific circumstances. But then one day, John was leading a medical team back from a remote area where they had been serving the people, but on the road that day they were ambushed. Many medical aid workers, including team leader John Anderson, were brutally murdered.

How does a story like that impact your view of missions? It affects me. It disturbs me. It could potentially even derail me. After all, how do I stand up here and call people to give their lives to advancing God's mission to the ends of the earth, to difficult and needy places when people like John and Betty Anderson, after pouring out their lives in service, end up with a legacy of the deepest heartbreak? I think many of us can easily conclude that missions is just plain stupid—at least missions like that—because the price is too high! The sacrifice is just too much. “Count me out!” we say. But not John Anderson!

John Anderson, if he were standing here today, would say, “Count me in.” Most of us would say, “Not me! The level of sacrifice is just not worth it!” John and Betty Anderson would say, “Yes, it is!” They would be joined by a very important voice for us to listen to.

If you have a Bible with you this morning, would you turn with me to the book of Philippians? Philippians is an incredible book. It is filled with some of the most beautifully articulated truth in Scripture, and one of the most prominent themes in Philippians is joy. Throughout this letter the Apostle Paul speaks of joy. It is powerful; it's beautiful—and it is crazy! It's crazy because of the context. After all, when Paul writes this joy-filled letter of hope and help, he is actually in chains in prison and he is literally wondering whether or not he's about to be killed. There is nothing in those circumstances that would typically be seen as a time for joy.

But that's the point, isn't it? Isn't that what we long for in Jesus? Something far greater than our circumstances? And Paul, because of his relationship with Christ, is anything but typical. In the beginning of chapter 3, Paul warns the Philippians about those who twist and pervert the gospel, boasting in themselves rather than Christ. To powerfully make his point, in verses 4-6 Paul shares his own human and religious resume. It's impressive, but then in verses 7-11 he makes it crystal clear that the things of this world are absolutely not what his life is about now. Philippians 3:7:

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith...

(*NASB, Philippians 3:7-9)

In this chapter, we find powerful and challenging words: **Whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord...**

...all things as loss, compared to knowing Jesus!

What about you? I think if we were being honest, most of us (myself included) would have a pretty hard time making such a statement. After all, what do you value? What do you hold as precious? What do you really like? What do you love? Of course, the obvious comes immediately to mind—our families, our close friends, our health, good stuff. But let's be honest, there's more, isn't there? Our positions? Our possessions? Our passions? There are a lot of things that we really love, things that we are loathe to leaving. But do we understand that there are people who are experiencing something in Jesus Christ that is so awesome that they would literally throw everything else in the trash in exchange for more of Him and His love. Friends, that is powerful! It's compelling! It's convicting!

Way back when I was a new believer, I remember being so struck by Philippians 3. I was so caught up by it, so compelled by Paul's language—his passion, his experience of the goodness of God! I remember reading this text with almost a surging, pulsing enthusiasm—right up until verse 10. Philippians 3:10:

... that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His ...what?

I want to know Christ. Yes! The power of His resurrection. Yes! The fellowship of His *suffering*? No! I hate that! Why does it say *that*? It's like we're on this really great ride and suddenly it comes to a screeching halt! Why, in the context of talking about intimately knowing and experiencing the surpassing greatness of God, would Paul say he *wants* to share in suffering? Ugh! I don't. Do you? But there it is. It's completely inescapable. And it is right in the context—in the middle—of a book that is all about joy! Philippians 3:10, once again:

... that I may know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Vs. 10-11)

One of the overarching principles in the New Testament is that often the gateway to life is actually death—literally, when we pass from this life into His presence, but more practically death to self—laying down our lives for him, not to have nothing, but to get self out of the way, that we might experience His life in and through us. That's what we picture in baptism. That's what Jesus talked about in so many different ways. The power of God is only released in a life that is surrendered to Him. That's when we begin to experience real life, the fruit of the Spirit!

The three foundational elements of the fruit of the Spirit are: love, joy and peace. I have never met a person who doesn't want more of that in their life. We all want love. We long for peace. We dream of being filled with joy. But I am convinced that we sabotage ourselves by being unwilling to get out of the way. We so fear and dread sacrifice that we barely touch the reality of what Paul was experiencing. I believe that in the American church we have, in large measure, settled. We have settled for self when we could, instead, have genuine love! We exchange safety for the prospect of true peace. We choose to continue to pursue comfort and we miss out on real joy.

When I heard that the Andersons were left alone near the border of that other country, I was pretty much horrified. It shows how I, how we, value safety more than God-given peace. To us, what they did seemed so unsafe. To them, they were experiencing lives marked by powerful peace. The Andersons were willing to die to self and really give their lives to loving and serving others. And guess what? They received such a life of love in return. They didn't see their calling as a cross they bore. They actually experienced lives filled with love, with peace—even in the midst of the world's most insane circumstances—and overflowing with joy.

So what do we do now? Paul modeled a great next step right in the next verse. Philippians 3:12:

Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Vs. 12-14)

We aren't perfect—far from it! And, it's okay. But here is the assignment: Forget what's behind, but do press on toward what is ahead—toward Christ! Don't just settle in and settle. There is something more and you can have it if you're willing to surrender the comfort, safety and pleasure of the small and selfish life for the sake of the One who is so awesome that everything you have is like trash compared to Him. What will He ask of you? I have no idea. Most of us will never be called to do what John and Betty Anderson were called to do. And part of me is so glad—relieved! But part of me is actually a little bit sad because of something that I saw about a month ago. I'll tell you more about that in a couple of minutes. First, let's take a good look at real life—the life of John Anderson.

[Video]

John Anderson was just an ordinary guy. But he sacrificed his life for the call of God for the sake of others. Betty Anderson sacrificed her treasured husband, friend, and life partner for the sake of the mission. That is what it's all about. The truth is: they had chosen to sacrifice themselves decades before John was martyred, and daily for thirty-three years. The question is: *Was it worth it?*

About a month ago I got to hear Betty Anderson speak and share their story in person. After she spoke, she asked the worship team to come out and sing a specific song, a song that she says has become her anthem. It's called, *I Lay Me Down*. The worship team came out and sang that song. I stood in shocked silence because Betty Anderson stayed on stage and sang with them. I watched this little woman in her 60's, who had been through so much hardship, who had lost her beloved husband to a cruel and evil death. I watched her worship and I was overwhelmed! I was broken because I was seeing something I have never truly, personally known. Not like that! I can honestly tell you, it was one of the most beautiful things I have ever seen. She was literally filled with joy! She stood and she sang and she danced like a little kid just abandoned to joy! And I knew that she knows Jesus. She knows exactly what Paul was talking about in Philippians 3. She has shared in Jesus' suffering but she has also truly come to know His joy! Someone who suffered so much, filled with such joy? You see, this really is crazy. It makes no worldly sense. But that is the point. Our God offers us something so much greater than the world! You and I can have it, but only if we're willing to truly lay our lives down.

Jesus, we ask You to enable us, God, to believe You that You are that kind of God, that You are that good. Enable us to believe You that there is something so much greater than the things we give our lives to. That You, oh Lord, are so much greater! Enable us to have a vision to see that there really is joy beyond measure that's found in abandon to You. Whatever it looks like, whatever You call us to, oh God, would You enable us to be people who could truly say, "I lay me down." In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

**Names, dates, and locations have been changed in this transcript for security reasons

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