

Series: IF YOU WANNA GO UP, YOU GOTTA GO DOWN

SUNDAY OCTOBER 4, 2020
GIVING IT UP, TRADING IT IN, WRITING IT OFF
Philippians 3:1-11
SPEAKER: KEN DAVIS

1. In January, 1983, Lori and I moved to the little town of Emporium, PA. The word **emporium** means **commercial center**—which this place **wasn't!** In doing some research before we moved, I found that that over 30% of the population was unemployed. And there was a very good reason for that. Sylvania Electric, which employed most of the people in the county, had laid off 90% of their workforce.

-Want to know why? Cause they made **the best radio tubes in the world**—and the world had embraced solid state technology! That actually happens on a regular basis. The Gutenberg Press put scribes out of business. Gasoline engines put carriages out of business. Computers put typewriters out of business, and Netflix put Blockbuster out of business.

- a. We know what it's like to live at one of these major intersections of history, don't we—cause right now we're in the middle of one! It's awkward! We're not sure **how** things are going to land. However, we all know **one** thing—**COVID-19 has changed everything!** We just don't know who's going out of business...**yet!**
- b. When solid state technology came along, it suddenly didn't matter who made the best radio tubes in the world! When the automobile industry caught on—it suddenly didn't matter **how** excellent your buggies were—or how excellent you were at driving them!
- c. When **Jesus** came, He pretty much flipped everything. See, He **descended** into greatness from **heaven!** His humility in doing that suddenly put spiritual self-promotion and self-advancement out of business. What Jesus made clear in this upside-down Kingdom is that if **up** is your goal, **down** is your direction. The **only** path to spiritual depth and greatness—is humility. A willingness to admit how small and helpless you really are!

-On the morning of Sunday, April 23, 33 A.D., the temple, the priesthood, and religious performance became irrelevant. Suddenly, the religious professionals were at the same level as everyone else. And one of the persons hit hardest by this paradigm shift of the **upside-down kingdom** was Saul of Tarsus.

-He'd spent a lifetime climbing to the top of his class, polishing his credentials, and being the **most passionate follower of Judaism ever**. If Jesus and His Followers were right, then everything he's worked **so hard** for—was gone. And he was **angry!** **Angry enough to kill! Which he, in fact, did!**

-His campaign to crush the Jesus' movement only ended when, one day, Jesus confronted him. And on that day, he gave it all up. Set his credentials and achievement's aside.

- d. This morning, I want to talk as clearly as I can about two very different plans for pleasing God, finishing well, and living forever. In this letter to the Philippians, Paul talks about this **performance plan** that he **had** been on. It actually makes sense to most of the people in our world because—it's **Conventional Wisdom**. It's what every religion runs on—depends on.

-The other plan—the one Jesus made possible, is the **grace plan**. You and I have to choose—and that choice is **the most important decision you'll ever make!**

- 2 Achievement in **our** world is a big deal. A **lot** of people are addicted to it. When it gets down to how to get ahead in life, most people will talk to you about **achieving**. And there **is** a place for achievement, right? If you want to be a world-class athlete or musician or artist, you have to start early and practice when other people goof off. That's why parents get their kids into some kind of classes before they're even potty trained.

-To **encourage** achievement we give incentive awards. We start with **Smarties**, you know, for potty training—then move on from there to trophies, plaques, diplomas, and recognition. Once people are addicted, they will **kill** themselves to get awards. "I did it! I beat the others out. I won!" We eventually move on to other symbolic trophies of achievement; the kind of car you drive, the place you live, your title, degree, or the location of your office.

-These are not necessarily bad things. God placed within us this desire for excellence, this desire to accomplish, do meaningful things, work hard to achieve goals. It builds our sense of self-worth.

- a. This **performance** plan gets toxic when it infiltrates our relational world. And it's **worse** when it becomes the basis for a relationship with God. So—**why is this an issue?** It's because **most** people in our world believe that you have to **earn** your way into heaven, or into a better life after you die. Even the ancient Egyptians believed that the final set of Heavenly scales would determine if your soul would live or die!

-Our **instincts** tell us, "Well to get ahead **anywhere** here on this planet, you have to **perform**—so God must be the same way! And Paul attacks the performance plan **head on!**

Whatever happens, my dear brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. I never get tired of telling you these things, and I do it to safeguard your faith. Watch out for those dogs, those people who do evil, those mutilators who say you must be circumcised to be saved. For we who worship by the Spirit of God are the ones who are truly circumcised. We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort, though I could have confidence in my own effort if anyone could. Indeed, if others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more! I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault. (Philippians 3:1-6 NLT)

- b. So, let me tell you what was going on. Paul had given his life telling people the **Good News**: Because we could never, **ever** earn our way into God's Presence, **God came here!** Jesus taught us about God, lived a perfect life, and then died on a cross **in our place** so we could receive life as a **gift**. It's **grace**—undeserved, unearned, and **unearnable**.

-But some of the people tried to create a combo package of Moses **and** Jesus. They said that Paul's Good News was **incomplete**—like, it left out the law of Moses. Their version was that if a person wanted eternal life and a relationship with God, they had to become Jewish first. That is, men had to be circumcised—and then besides trusting Jesus—they needed to follow the law of Moses—sabbath, dietary laws, etc., etc.

-These people were known as **Judaizers**. In case you hadn't noticed, Paul is isn't very complimentary. He calls them **dogs, evildoers, mutilators of the flesh**.

- c. So, why did Paul have to get so **nasty**? It's because this teaching twisted everything Jesus came to do. The Son of God sets aside his rights as God, humbles himself, and goes to a cross for **us**—and they say, "Sorry, Jesus—**it wasn't enough!**" Going **backwards** discredited Jesus and all He taught—along with the Apostles and the church. Grace is a gift—it's **unearnable**—not a reward for good livin' people!

-Now, how many of you think that the message, "Believe in Jesus and then follow the Jewish Law" sounds like **Good News**? It **wasn't!** Not for the guys who needed surgery!

- d. If **anyone** knew the performance plan, Paul did!

...We can list what many might think are impressive credentials. You know my pedigree: a legitimate birth, circumcised on the eighth day; an Israelite from the elite tribe of Benjamin; a strict and devout adherent to God's law; a fiery defender of the purity of my religion, even to the point of persecuting the church; a meticulous observer of everything set down in God's law Book. The very credentials these people are waving around as something special, I'm tearing up and throwing out with the trash—along with everything else I used to take credit for. And why? Because of Christ! (Philippians 3:3-7 MSG)

- e. Now, for many of you—what Paul says about his pedigree totally escapes you because no one talks about this stuff any more. Let me try to put it in terms we might understand. In my world—and yours—it would be represented by this big Bible

-If you have a religious background, it would include the baptismal records, christening gowns, church membership certificates, ordination degrees, Bible classes you've taken and Bible verses you've memorized, Christian music—I mean, if you get cut, you bleed little crosses.

-Paul **reached the pinnacle of religion!** He wasn't just the seminary professor, he was the president of the denomination. He's written commentaries and knew his Bible better than anyone else. **There wasn't a religious question he couldn't answer or a debate he couldn't win!**

-His moral record—in terms of keeping the law—was **spotless!** He knew all the right language, the codewords, the secret handshakes... To put it bluntly, religiously—he would've left **all** of us in the dust!

- f. In an irreligious culture like ours, achievement is measured differently; you know, trophies, awards, commendations for service and for money raised for charities, employee-of-the-year, family portraits, books published, diplomas and gowns, name plates, and awards for saving the environment.

-And when you **get** this kind of recognition—you begin to believe your own press. We think, "Well, everyone who knows me admires me. I've never cut a shady deal, never cheated on my spouse or my taxes—and never slugged a competitor. I've given to good causes, recycled **everything**, helped my neighbor shovel her driveway—and followed **all** the rules during COVID-19. I am a **good person!**"
God should be proud to have me on his team!

-So—**does God have a problem with good people? NO!** Of course not. The **problem** is pride; the arrogance of thinking that God should overlook our sin because we weren't terrible persons! **Nothing** Jesus said supports that.

3. And **that** presents a problem—because most of the people in our world, right this moment, **believe** in and are **betting their eternity** on—and **feeling good about** the **Achievement Plan**. Just go downtown and **ask** people about their plan for the afterlife. **The #1 answer i-i-i-s-s-s, DING! "I'm a good person! Better than most!"**

-People believe that there's this giant set of scales in the sky—and if the **good** in your life outweighs the **bad**—you'll be fine. Actually when you look into the religions of the world you find that they are all **some mutation of that—including a lot of what gets passed off as Christianity!**

And Paul's commentary on this is:

Watch out for those dogs, those people who do evil, those mutilators who say you must be circumcised to be saved. (Philippians 3:2 NLT)

-Now, I know some of you are thinking, "But I **love** my dog! She's **so cute!**" The dogs in that culture were vicious, disease ridden scavengers—not like your Golden Retriever puppy!

-Let's translate this to **us**: People in our culture would say, "You mean if I try to be good person, not hurt anyone, give to charity, and try to save the environment—I'm a **vicious scavenger?** No. This is addressing the people who are **teaching** something that **drags** people away from the love and grace of God **and** the sacrifice of Jesus—and saying, "Sorry; leaving heaven, humbling yourself, being spit on and nailed to a cross wasn't enough! We need to **perform** and **achieve** to do what you obviously **couldn't** do!"

4. So **here's** where I want to focus: **The evil in the achievement plan, the performance plan, is not in the good things people do. It's the fact that it doesn't work**—and to teach someone that it does is spiritual malpractice! It's like pointing a person who's lost in the woods in the wrong direction—knowing they'll die of hypothermia! If Jesus, in fact, came to save us, the performance plan is the biggest hoax in the world.

-I'll tell you why; our problem as humans is **not** cosmetic—you know, “hair treatment, a little make up, a few nips and tucks—and we're fine!” Sin is the issue, and sin, like cancer, is progressive and, ultimately, deadly. Sin is what wrecked **everything**—and will wreck us, unless we deal with it.

- a. Know what the problem is with the **achievement plan**? First of all, it's based on comparison. The sin in us, like all evil, is **really** good at camouflage. Most people, instead of seeing and owning their own junk hide behind someone else who's **really** screwed up. “Hey, I'm not **that** bad!”

-According to his achievement plan—and Paul was **really** good at achieving, he thought, “If anyone can get close to God based on performance—it's **me!** At its core, the **achievement** plan is about our **pride**—which makes things **worse!**”

- b. But the **real** problem with the **achievement** plan is that it can't change the heart—that part of us that deceives us into thinking that we're just fine! And the **achievement** plan ultimately tells **God** that he's got it wrong; that we really don't need Jesus or the Holy Spirit. And the achievement plan ignores **the list**.

-See, you and I haven't arrived at this moment without a **list**. You know, the list of sins—things we've done wrong; things we **knew** were wrong when we did them. Things that have hurt us, others, and God. And as good as we live, **the list** remains. People think, “Well, isn't there kind of an **expiry** date on sins?”

-Think for a minute about where we are. The world watched with horror the video of George Floyd dying, begging for his life, asking for his mother. Think about all the **horrible** things that happen in a single day in our world. **One act of rebellion started the whole mess!**

- c. The achievement plan **seems** innocent, but it is a cover-up of the darkest kind. It is **the single most believed lie** in the world, it's led **billions** of people astray—and it frustrates God's plan, through Jesus, who make everything right and whole again.

5. And Paul tells us what he did with **the** performance plan he was depending on. You know, his resume, his religious version of his summa cum laude, **Pulitzer Prize, Nobel Peace Prize, Oscar, Juno, Grammy** and **MVP** awards. He tells us; he **traded it in, gave it up, wrote it off**.

-He puts it like this:

I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with him. (Philippians 3:7-9 NLT)

-To be honest, religion is **all about** performance—you know, what we give, what we do, how much we know, the rules we keep, the people we **don't** associate with—and the bad things we **don't** do. Paul says, ***In comparison with knowing Jesus and being one with Him? GARBAGE!***

-Some of you have heard me talk about the word Paul uses here in the original language. The PG translation is **garbage**. **Skubala** was not a nice word; it was more of a bumper sticker word, as in **Skubala Happens!** Dog dung. I mean, do you see it? Paul calls **his** list of achievements, **skubala**—dog dung and calls the people who teach that you need to achieve your way to God--**dogs!** Makes you want to say, “Wow, Paul! Tell us how you **really** feel!”

- a. And then Paul tells us **why**:

I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God’s way of making us right with himself depends on faith. (Philippians 3:9-10 NLT)

-Here’s the deal; most people **instinctively** know that if there is a God, He is, by definition, bigger and better than we could **ever** imagine. We believe, as followers of Jesus, that He was and is God. **God in a body**—the perfect expression of **Who** God is.

-According to Paul and all who knew and saw Jesus and the price He paid define grace as God’s gift of life, forgiveness and perfection to **anyone** who will ask. Jesus lived the life **I** should have lived and died the death **I** should have died. See, the standard for life forever with God is **so** high, no one can reach it—so God **gives** it to us as an act of extreme love.

-Receiving it is simply an act of faith—that God loves and forgives as an extension of **who He is!** The achievement plan says something **totally different**. **First, Jesus’ life and death wasn’t good enough; Second, I’m good enough on my own. I don’t need Him!**

- b. Remember what Paul says about Jesus—and why He was given the Name above every Name? **He did not cling to His rights as God, but laid aside His mighty power and humbled Himself to become a servant and die on a cross.** To go **up** you gotta go **down**. We simply humble ourselves—and in **faith** receive what He died in an act of supreme love--to give us! **That’s** what saves us from our sin and from a future we don’t want.

Paul puts it like this in another letter:

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. (Ephesians 2:8-10 NLT)

- c. See, if performance is okey-dokey with God, why would He spend 1000s of years preparing the world for His coming—and then die a messy, humiliating death on a cross?

-In this context, Paul says,

... For we who worship by the Spirit of God are the ones who are truly circumcised. We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort. (Philippians 3:3 NLT)

-What He's saying is that it's the power of the Spirit of God who changes us—makes us the people God always intended for us to be—dating back to when the law was given to Moses. It **has** to be the Spirit's work, not ours!

- d. All of this, all that God has done as an act of love and kindness is **grace**. The performance plan, the achievement plan is spelled **D-O**. You just keep doing, achieving, aspiring, working--but no one ever tells you how much is enough. Know why? It's because you **can't** do enough.

- The **Grace** plan is spelled **D-O-N-E**. Jesus paid it all--all to Him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain--he washed it white as snow. Performance mucks it up; a little like a guy giving the girl he loves an engagement ring—and her saying, “Wait—I want to **pay you for this!**”

-We're going to talk more about this next week, but **GRACE** is **the most beautiful, the most amazing word, concept, picture, idea, gift in the universe**. The word literally means **bend; stoop**. And it's what **Jesus, God the Son** does.

*Grace is a **father running to meet, kiss, and throw a feast for a son** who's blown the inheritance.

*Grace is **Jesus calling the biggest crook in town out of a tree** and saying, “Hey—let's do lunch today!”

***Grace is a thief on a cross**—who's spent his whole life hurting people—being told by Jesus that they will walk the streets of Paradise together later that day!

6. Now, don't you think to yourself—at least a **little: WHY NOT RECEIVE GRACE!?** Why would anyone refuse a gift like this? I mean, who would ever refuse the love and kindness of the One who made everything?

-I'm guessing that for **some**, it just seems too good to be true. Other think, “Man, I've gotta have **more evidence** than some ancient book to convince me that it's true!

-But the **hardest** part is, well, trading in your list of achievements and accomplishments. We're **proud** of those things! There's a little piece of us that arrogantly thinks, “Anyone—including God, should be **glad** to have me on His team!” But you have to gather up all that stuff. **Give it up, trade it in, write it off**. That's what Paul had to do. That's what I had to do. That's what you have to do.

- a. Do you know that most of the **best living, most respected, greatest people** in Jesus' day hated Him? Why?

How can people who talk about God all the time, and talk about how *much* they love the Holy Writings—reject God and cheer when He gets nailed to the cross? It's because they were deeply invested in the **achievement plan!** It's **hard** to trade in what you've worked so **hard** for!

- b. And we're like that about our achievements and awards, aren't we? Even when they're outdated diplomas in a \$2 frame. In Guinness World Book of Records, there's a picture of a guy hugging an 10' high ball of string he's collected. What's it worth? Nothing! And there's a guy with 3' long fingernails that, over time have crippled his hand. What's it worth? Not much! Think they'd ever give this stuff up? **Absolutely not!**

-Sometimes people base their lives on stuff **just like this**—even after giving their lives to Jesus. They walk through life **totally impressed** with and **trying to impress others with** all the things they've done, who they're related to, how much of the Bible they know, what kind of standards they have, how many companies they've run... The only thing missing is the **barf bag for the people who have to listen!**

-Let's just call this what it is. **Pride**. And it devalues the horrible price Jesus paid **to make all things right—including us**. Paul says, "Man, you'd **better** see that stuff for what it is before you hand in your life!"

- c. Paul's final words on this issue are these:

I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!
(Philippians 3:10-11 NLT)

-Paul says, **I want to know Christ—as best as I can!** People on the achievement plan say: **I want to know me!** I want to know the right information, the right people, and get on—and say on the right track—that will impress others!

- d. In contrast to the performance plan, Paul says, I want to know the **power of his resurrection**. I don't want to just shine up the exterior of my life in a way that impresses others. **I want to really live!** I want to **be transformed!**

-And he says, **I want to suffer with him!** What a strange thing to say! Most people don't want to suffer. The point of the achievement plan is to embrace prestige; get other people to want to be like you. Paul says the opposite; **I want to be so much like Jesus that I can't help but create the reaction in the world that He created!** I respect Jesus so much that I will accept **any** suffering if it makes me like Jesus.

- e. The final point Paul makes here is that **sharing in Jesus' death would be an honor**. Actually, **death** is the enemy of the **performance plan**. When you die, it **really doesn't matter how impressed people were with you and what you achieved**. They'll note it at your funeral and write it into your obituary. And then? **Th-th-th-that's all folks!**

-When we die, all the awards, all the accomplishments, all the plaques, degrees, diplomas, honorary degrees, signs on the door, name-dropping--it all gets cancelled. It gets pried out of our cold, rigamortis hands--and the show is over.

-I'll tell you **exactly** why Paul wanted to be like Jesus in his death. It's because before there can be an **Easter**--a resurrection to glory--there has to be a **Good Friday**. There has to be a time when we pile all our stuff at the foot of the cross, say, "Jesus—I'm **giving it up, trading it in, writing it off!** Compared to **grace?** **Skubala!**

7. In case I haven't made this whole thing clear enough this morning, I want to close with a picture; a graph. You know me and drawings! Let's say this line represents a continuum. At the top—God—and the kind of life that pleases God and endures forever. And on the continuum, where people are in terms of their personal accomplishments.

-So, at the bottom, let's put the **Hitler's** of the world. Charles Manson's—people who prey on and kill children. They deserve to be there, right?

- a. How about **Mother Theresa?** Amazing person—gave her life to help the most unfortunate people on the planet and spoke out about poverty and injustice. I don't know her, but I think she'd put herself about the middle. Billy Graham? Never met him—but I've read a lot about him—and I think he'd put himself below Mother Theresa.

-I've followed Jesus most of my life and have given the greater part of my life trying to help others. I'd put myself about here—**way** below Mother Theresa and Billy!

- b. So. If you were to put an "X" on this continuum, where would it be? See, if you're on the **achievement plan**, how are you going to get from **where you are** to **where you want to be** before you die? And what about the **list?** You know the stuff you've done that has hurt others, defied God and wounded you?

-**Grace** simply means that by **giving His life**, Jesus makes up the difference--wherever you are, whatever you've done. What could **possibly** keep you from trading in, giving up, writing off your achievement plan this morning? See, right this moment, you're only a **prayer** away from **GRACE!**