

# A Changed Man

**Jason Abbott**

What do you celebrate? It's what you love; isn't it? It's what you enjoy; right? You have a wonderful meal, and you begin telling everybody they need to try it too. You see an excellent movie, and so you make your wife or friends watch it with you. These are a kind of celebration—a kind of rejoicing. Aren't they? A kind of worship, if you will.

I love F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel, *The Great Gatsby*. It's an amazing book. Therefore, I commend it to others and encourage them to read it and to enjoy it also. When they are lukewarm on it, I attempt to show them its simple beauty and power; I want them to celebrate it too! When it's made into a film and they change it at all—*when the change it in any way!*—I'm immediately offended and oppose the change. (Don't even get me started with what director Baz Luhrmann does with the character of Owl Eyes in his film, especially in the library scene. He totally missed the boat on that one. He actually has Owl Eyes convey the very opposite kind of information about Gatsby. And, there's not a connection to Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography in the movie either. Super frustrating! But, I digress.) Where was I?

Oh yeah, loving something and celebrating something changes us; doesn't it? Our views change. Our behaviors change. Our values even change. All these things are shaped and transformed by what we love and how we rejoice over it.

In today's passage, Paul tells us about the transformation that has taken place in him—how an encounter with God and God's love changed everything in his life. Listen to how he celebrates and rejoices because of this transformation.

## **Philippians 3:1-14**

**3** Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. <sup>2</sup> Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. <sup>3</sup> For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh— <sup>4</sup> though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup>circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup>as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

<sup>7</sup>But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup>What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup>and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. <sup>10</sup>I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup>and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

<sup>12</sup>Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. <sup>13</sup>Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, <sup>14</sup>I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

\*\*\*\*\*

So, we want to make sense of Paul's transformation. There's been a change in him; hasn't there. So, what's going on here. Well, I think some questions can help to guide our study. Let's ask: (1<sup>st</sup>) What *did* Paul want? (2<sup>nd</sup>) What *does* Paul want? And, (3<sup>rd</sup>) What changed Paul's desires?

### **1. What *did* Paul want?**

In the early church, there were false teachers (*just like there are for us today!*) who wanted to make salvation about works. They took the gospel and added things to it. So, rather than teaching salvation by grace alone thru faith alone in Christ alone, these false teachers added something to the saving mix.

One common addition in the early days was the Jewish right of circumcision. Certain false preachers would teach that males needed to be circumcised to be saved. And, here Paul is warning the Philippians against these teachers—these “mutilators

of the flesh” (v. 2). Like me with the Great Gatsby, Paul is jealous for the good news of Jesus Christ to remain pure—nothing added to it and nothing taken away from it. He’s jealous for this *because* to add something to the good news or to take something away from the good news makes it just regular old news.

*Nothing worth rejoicing over! Nothing worthy of our transformation!*

In order to demonstrate this, the apostle shares how he used to see things a lot like these false teachers—how he used to place his confidence in his righteousness, in his own actions and works.

Listen again to what he once desired. Listen to what he trusted for salvation.

*If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in...the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness...faultless (vv. 4-6).*

Paul is saying, *If anyone was getting to heaven by his works and his obedience then it was me. Look at my resume! I was among the elite—among the most religious!* And, humanly speaking, he was. These aren’t empty words. If works could save, then Paul was on his way. But, works can’t save! Works can’t bring us contentment and peace with God. They always leave us wanting more.

Tom Brady is statistically speaking the greatest NFL quarterback to ever play. There’s really no question about that. He’s won six Super Bowls. In four of those, he was the MVP. Three times he’s been selected as the NFL’s most valuable player. I could go on and on with his awards and accolades. Suffice it to say, Tom Brady has every reason to trust in and be at peace with his achievements.

Yet, in an interview with 60 Minutes after winning his third Super Bowl title, he confessed that he felt restless and desired more. Here’s what he said about it.

*Why do I have three Super Bowl Rings...and still think there’s something greater out there for me? I mean, maybe a lot of people would say, “Hey man, that’s what it is. I’ve reached my goal, my dream....” Me, I think...there’s got to be more than this. I mean, this can’t be what it’s all cracked up to be.<sup>1</sup>*

---

<sup>1</sup> You can watch an extended clip of that interview [here](#).

Friends, Paul was pursuing peace with God; he was running after his salvation. He worked constantly for it—moving from place to place weeding-out Christians who, in his view, were twisting the truth of God. Yet, it was never enough for him. His works didn't bring him peace. As with Tom Brady, Paul wanted more.

What, friends, do you want or desire? What do you seek to bring you peace? Is it a professional goal? Is it a particular view of family? Is it a certain kind of fame? Where are you trying to rejoice? Where are you directing your worship?

The now deceased writer David Foster Wallace was not a Christian believer. He, nevertheless, recognized the futility of worshiping that which cannot fulfill us. Here's what he said during a graduation address at Kenyon College in 2005.

*If you worship money and things—if they are where you tap real meaning in life—then you will never have enough. Never feel you have enough. It's the truth. Worship your own body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly, and when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally plant you.... Worship power—you will feel weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to keep the fear at bay. Worship your intellect, being seen as smart—you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out.<sup>2</sup>*

Friends, there's *nothing* more dangerous and destructive than false worship—the pursuit of false gods to rejoice over. Examine your heart. Examine your desire. Examine your worship. And, wherever you find idols, cast them down.

Let's move to our next question.

## **2. What *does* Paul want?**

Paul's life took a dramatic turn. While trying to earn his salvation before God by persecuting Christians—putting them in prison and even having them executed—he became a Christian; Paul became the very kind of person he hated. *A total change!* Look at what he desires after his conversion.

*But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider*

---

<sup>2</sup> You can read Foster Wallace's extended address [here](#).

*them garbage, that I may gain Christ.... I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like [Christ Jesus] in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead (vv. 7-8, 10-11).*

During his earthly ministry, Jesus told a story about desire. He said that there was a man who found a treasure in a field and couldn't believe how superb it was. He was transfixed by this treasure. It changed everything—his desires and his values and his behavior. All the things he owned were nothing in comparison to the treasure. So, he left and sold all he had to buy that field and gain that treasure.

Friends, Jesus tells us that the treasure, in his little parable, is like the kingdom of heaven. That's how much we should desire to enter into the kingdom of the Lord. We should be willing to sacrifice everything to enter God's kingdom.

Now, I want you to notice something here. This isn't a command thru parable. This is simply an expression of basic economics. The man wasn't forced to sell all he had. *He wanted to sell it all!* He wasn't losing in this exchange. *He was winning! He gained infinitely more than he had before!* Basic economics.

That's how Paul views following Christ. He cannot believe his good fortune. He's so thankful to have Jesus. His old way of life—everything he used to value—is total garbage in comparison to the glory of having Jesus as his Savior and Lord. Paul doesn't bemoan having to give up everything. *Paul rejoices that he's now free from it all! He is celebrating here! He is worshiping here!*

Look, Paul may have thought he was rich before, but he was actually poor. And, the world may see him as poor now, but he's actually absolutely rich in Christ. So, all Paul wants now is more of his Lord—more of what's really and truly valuable. Again, it's just basic economics.

I wonder if you see what you sell off for God or give up for Christ in that way. I wonder if you see your earthly losses as heavenly gains.

Well, let's turn to our final question.

### **3. What changed Paul's desires?**

Now, you probably think you know the answer to this one; right? You think, *This is Sunday school 101; the answer is Jesus*. But, that would only be partly right. That would be a truth in need of an explanation.

If you know Paul's story, then you know that he was heading to Damascus when he had a confrontation with the risen Christ. And, Jesus tells him he's wrong. He tells him that he's not working for God but against God (Acts 9:1-19).

But, friends, that's not the end of the story. Jesus doesn't send him on his way at that point. Jesus sends him into relationships with other believers. Our Lord works on Paul through other Christians—first, through a faithful disciple named Ananias and, then, through many others over many years. In fact, our Lord was still working on Paul through such relationships in today's passage. Look again at what Paul says to the Philippians.

*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus (vv. 12-14).*

Friends, I would submit to you that even through the writing of this letter—even through instructing and encouraging the church—the Lord is transforming Paul and his desires. His relationship with Christ *has changed him and is changing him*—sculpting his thoughts and desires, giving him more and more of the mind of Christ through his participation in the fellowship of Christ's church.

Our relationship with Jesus transforms us. And, our relationships in his Body, the Church, transform us. *Because*—Jesus works through them.

When I met my wife, I changed. If you can believe it, I didn't really like coffee before I met her. She, however, worked at a coffee shop. So, I started going there—fairly often, like every day. But, then, I really got to know her as we began to date. And, even more changes began to take place in me—changes in the way I thought and in the way I behaved. I wanted to please her and make her happy.

Now, however, after nearly 20-years of marriage, those changes seem small in comparison. At this point, I'm a completely different person than I was back then. I have a different heart. I have different hopes. Our relationship has transformed me.

The Lord has used it and is using it to transform my life. And, my wife is simply one of many Christian examples of this.

Friends, through your relationship with Christ Jesus and your relationships with his followers—those who are a lot like you and, especially, those who are not—God is pleased to change you and your desires. *So that, you'll forget what's behind and pursue what's ahead, pursue that to which God has called you in Christ.*