

**“Yes, skubalon means dung.” Philippians 3:4-14**

**If anyone else thinks he has reason for 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; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 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 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. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.**

Have you ever been in prison? It is not the best place to find yourself. But did you know that the apostle Paul was imprisoned several times? Always because of the same reason.

Because he was telling people what God the Creator has done for us through His Son Jesus Christ. He was simply telling that through Jesus Christ everyone, everyone can receive forgiveness of all their sins and eternal life.

Today we read this section from Paul's letter to Philippians. This letter is sometimes called Paul's joyful letter. Why? Because several times in this letter Paul repeats these words: "Rejoice in the Lord!" Rejoice! Rejoice in the Lord!

This is also the same letter where Paul wrote these words which we hear every Sunday. "Peace of God which surpasses all human understanding, keep your minds and souls safe in Jesus Christ."

Where was Paul when he wrote this joyful and peaceful letter? Can you guess? I hinted to it a minute ago. Yes! He was in a prison. Paul was in a prison and from the prison he wrote this letter to brothers and sister in Christ in Philippi.

How can this be? How can someone be joyful and at peace when all circumstances around him were against him?! Can we think about ourselves for a while and about people we know – what determines our emotional state?

The way the things go in our lives. If we do well according to our own standards and standards set by the society or our peers, then we can be happy and joyful. If we can afford what we desire, if we have what we want, if we have materially

secured our future, if we enjoy our status, if others think of us well, if we are seemingly in control of our lives. When we have these things, people usually are quite happy.

But, what if we fail to live according our own standards, or according the standards set by others? What if we are poor? What if we can't afford what our hearts desire, or even things that we truly need?

What if we struggle, what if there is no security about our future, what if we don't know what tomorrow will bring? What if we don't have any status, what if we are like nobody for others. What if others think about us with contempt, what if they look at us with disdain? What if our peers ignore us or sneer at us?

What if we apparently are not in control of our lives? What about then? Are we still joyful and at peace? You tell me. Sure there are miraculous exceptions, but probably most of the time the answer would be 'no' – far from it.

If things don't go the way we hope, we may be anxious, we may be depressed, we may be ashamed, we may be stressed and struggling with self-worth, we may be in despair and so on. There is not much space for joy and peace.

But how come that Paul, being in prison had joy and peace and both of them abundantly? Would you like to have this kind of joy and peace, that doesn't depend on circumstances around you?

So that whatever happens around you doesn't rob you of your joy and peace? I would love to have more of it. Much more. If this is true about you as well, then right here Paul gives us the recipe. And it is very simple.

Remember, now Paul is in prison, because of the Gospel about God's undeserved grace. But he use to have a very different live. He was born in a wealthy family, he received Roman citizenship at his birth, and that was a great privilege at that time.

He was sent to the best teachers and enjoyed wonderful education. His pedigree opened doors for his career, his zeal and commitment to the Lord, as he understood it, made him one of leading figures in early Christian persecutions.

He had connections to the Jewish government and according to the standards and expectation of his days ... he was the man to envy. He had so many reasons to rejoice and to be at peace. All seemed to be good.

But then – Christ happened. Jesus appeared to Paul. Jesus spoke to Paul. Jesus called Paul to be His messenger. Jesus told that Paul will have to suffer a lot for Jesus' names sake. And it turned Paul's live upside down.

Remember, Paul wasn't someone struggling to somehow make it through, he was successful guy, many would envy him for what he had received and for who he was. But listen to what Paul himself said.

“But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.” Did you hear? All the great and appealing things and prospects that he had, he counted them as loss.

“Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” Here we approach to Paul's secret recipe. Knowing, truly knowing Jesus my Lord.

Nothing can be compared with this knowledge, with this experience. Knowing God, who became a man, suffered and died, so that He could forgive you all your sins and bring you in His eternal Kingdom.

Truly know Him. True God and true man. The One who died instead of me. Who took my death. Who died for my rebellion and trespasses. In the Bible ‘to know’ is not about simply intellection knowing.

It is about this deep and intimate connection similar to the one that people experience in blessed marriage, where two become one on so many levels. One thing is to know that there is this God, and His Son Jesus Christ.

But totally different thing is to know Him as your God and Saviour. It is like knowing that there is such a person (who bear a name of your spouse), or to have this person as your spouse, in most wonderful, harmonious and intimate relationships. Do you see the difference?

“For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain 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.”

You know that children are very quick to memorize slang and swear words. Once they hear them they are immediately engraved in their memory. Are we different? I'll teach you one in ancient Greek, and it comes from the Bible. Paul wrote it.

This word is skubalon. Skubalon! We have it translated and rubbish, but it is much juicier, much closer to dang, manure, and things like that. Skubalon – this is how Paul calls his previous life with all its highs and benefits.

So that only he could be with Christ, so that he can be found in Christ. Not because he deserved it, none of us do, but because this is God's gift to us. Grace that our minds struggle to comprehend.

In faith we are made from skubalon into children of God. If faith we are lifted from skubalon of this broken world into Jesus bosom. In faith, that is – as soon as you

believe that Jesus forgives you all your sins and make you God's heir, it happens, it is truly yours.

Paul goes on in his excitement: "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 [...] because Christ Jesus has made me his own. [...] I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

Did you notice what was Paul writing? That he may share Jesus sufferings. What is that? What kind of strange wish is that? It is not strange. Not at all. Actually this is what we all as Christians are called to do.

We can call it to share in Jesus' sufferings, or we can call it to carry our cross. The point is, once you meet your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, once you get to know Him, truly know Him – God and man, who stepped in your shoes, who voluntarily took your death sentence so that you could live, you want to imitate Him.

He is the most wonderful person. He is the One whose love has transformed the whole world. He is the One whose unconditional and self-sacrificial service has changed the hearts of millions and millions.

When Jesus happens with you, you want to live as He did, so that He could be pleased with you, proud about you, so that you could show Him how much He means to you.

He has made us, He has made you His own. This is also what Luther writes in the Small Catechism, that Jesus Christ has made me, a sinner, His own. I belong to Him. You belong to Him. Moreover, He has prepared a prize for you in heaven, a reward for everything you have done following Him.

How about this for the reason for joy and peace? I pray that you all could experience 'knowing of Jesus', when He comes with His Spirit and turns your life upside down, when you can say with joy that everything else is skubalon comparing with knowing Jesus.

Then we can live for Him. Then we want to live for Him. Whatever the price is. Then He is the centre of our lives. Then He is our source of peace and joy. Then we desire to go and share what Jesus has done for everyone, then we are no longer worried what people may think about us, or how well we will look.

Then we desire one thing. More of Christ. For He is the source of never-ending joy and peace. Not this world, not people around us, not our status or success, but Jesus is your joy and your peace. And no one can take Him away. Whatever happens.

On the contrary, when your time comes, He will take you away. To be with Him. To see Him as He is. That is most certainly true. This is why Paul could rejoice and be at peace.

This is why you can rejoice and be at peace. That's God's recipe for you. We know it, let's make it work. Let us pray that we can do at least something so that more people can get to know Jesus; not to know about Him, but to know Him.

And if it means to lose somethings, to suffer rejection or ridicule, or to be looked at with disdain, remember Paul, everything else is skubalon comparing to knowing my Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.