

As we continue our march to the Cross of our Lord Jesus we remember how life is hard. We face so many challenges as we struggle to provide for ourselves and our families. That's what we're going to talk about as we consider St. Paul's words to the church in Philippi, how he puts everything into perspective and finds hope in his relationship with Jesus.

PRAYER

READ Philippians 3:4b-14: St. Paul wrote: "If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ 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; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. ⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 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 ⁹ 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— ¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. ¹² 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. ¹³ 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, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

St. Paul wrote, Philippians 3:4, "If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more...."

St. Paul was saying, Look, if you think you're something, let me tell you, I've been there and I know what it feels like to have the tiger by the tail! It looks good, it feels good, but let me tell you something else: what you're counting on is nothing! It's like the weather; it changes day-by-day. It provides no security, no

lasting sense of purpose, and it certainly is not something you'll take with you into eternity.

And so he continued, giving the reader his list of stuff that once gave him "confidence in the flesh":

Philippians 3:5-6

**"...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;
⁶as to zeal,
a persecutor of the church;
as to righteousness,
under the law blameless."**

The backstory to these claims is that the Lord commanded Abraham to circumcise his male offspring when they were 8-days old. This tradition continued until it became a commandment for all of Israel. Paul was of the people of Israel, indeed, not a proselyte who would've been circumcised as an adult, which was kind of like saying, "I was baptized as an infant in the Lutheran church; I'm no convert from another denomination!"

Paul said he was "of the tribe of Benjamin," which was one of the best tribes, for it was Benjamin, the father of the tribe, whom Jacob, his father, loved most. He was the baby of the family. Benjamin was the only son born in the Promised Land. And it was his tribe that would eventually hold the position of honor on the battle-line when Israel went to war. All of the other tribes followed Benjamin crying out, "After thee, O Benjamin!"

Paul said he was a Pharisee. "Pharisee" means "separated one," as in distinct from everyone else. They were the spiritual athletes of Judaism. If you wanted to go toe-to-toe with Paul in your spiritual disciplines, you would lose. He prayed more, fasted more, gave more alms, and studied more in one year than you would've in your entire life!

As for “zeal,” this was an admirable quality among the Jews. A Pharisee on steroids!

And as for “righteousness” and “blamelessness,” Paul could say there was not a single law which he had not followed, and if he had broken one, he’d repented and offered up the appropriate sacrifice.

But in the end where did it get him? Despite his religion, Paul discovered he was not serving God. He was responsible for the martyrdom of Stephen, one of Christ’s early disciples, and he blasphemed Christ’s work, depending on his own righteousness to save his soul. So he wrote,

Philippians 3:7-9 (a/b/c lettering is for grammatically diagramming the passage)

a “BUT whatever GAIN I had,

b I counted as LOSS for the sake of Christ.

c Indeed, I count everything as LOSS because of the surpassing worth of KNOWING Christ Jesus my Lord.

b’ For his sake I have suffered the LOSS of all things and count them as RUBBISH (dung),

a’ in order that I may GAIN Christ⁹ and be FOUND in him,

a not having a RIGHTEOUSNESS of my own that comes from the LAW,

b but that which comes through FAITH in Christ,

a’ the RIGHTEOUSNESS from God that depends on FAITH,

All the stuff concerning his religion as a Pharisee, Paul wrote off with one stroke of the pen: “BUT whatever GAIN I had, I counted as LOSS for the sake of Christ.”

The things he had once counted on, Paul realized were actually getting in the way of his relationship with God. He wrote, “I count everything as LOSS because of the surpassing worth of KNOWING Christ Jesus my Lord.”

Paul was saying that he wanted to have a deep personal relationship with Jesus; he really wanted to know him as his Lord, as the one to whom he would commit his life to, forever.

He said that he desired to do this, "IN ORDER THAT I may GAIN Christ and be FOUND in Him." He was saying that he wanted to grow in the assurance that Christ's life was his life; that His peace was his peace; that His victory was his victory.

Paul said that he wanted to be "found in Him." This means that when the last trumpet sounds and the angels are singing the Hallelujah Chorus on the Last Day, the Lord is going to read Paul's name in the Book of Life and Paul is going to say, "Here am I!"

Paul wrote that his heart's desire was,

Philippians 3:10-11 (a/b lettering is for grammatically diagramming the passage)
a that I may KNOW him and the POWER of his RESURRECTION,

b and may SHARE his SUFFERINGS, becoming like him in his DEATH,

a' THAT by any means possible I may attain the RESURRECTION from the DEAD."

When Paul wrote that he wanted to know the "power of His resurrection," he was talking about his assurance of salvation. Here's a case in point: I talked with a young woman a few weeks ago. She was a new ager with a sprinkling of Christianity. She told me she hopes there is a purgatory. I asked her why she would hope such a dreadful thing. She said she wanted to be cleansed of all of her past doings as she prepared to meet God.

This sounded like a noble wish. But I asked her, "How much cleansing is enough to meet a holy God?" She hadn't thought about that part of the equation yet. But then I offered her a better alternative. I said, "If Jesus is your Lord, He lives in you and before God you are already cleansed. In fact, you're prepared to meet Him when He reads your name from the Book of Life on the Last Day. That's the promise." That's the assurance of salvation Paul was talking about.

Paul also wrote that he wanted to "share His sufferings." But he was a little nuts, right?! But let's think about this. Most of us have suffered and/or will suffer a great deal before we die. There is no "free skate," even for the most faithful when it comes to suffering. So Paul was talking about how we suffer. In other words, we can choose to suffer well or we can choose to suffer poorly. On the one hand, we may despair over our mortality, concentrate on our pain, and give up hope. Or we

can consciously choose to fall into the arms of Jesus, the one who loves us, knowing, believing that He is with us, and that He will fulfill all of His promises, and that on the Last Day God our Father will call us by name and say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

On the Cross, Jesus’ last words were, **“Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit.” Luke 23:46** In the end, it’s just you and the Lord. When we suffer, either we drown in despair or our relationship with the Lord becomes more real, more intense.

I think it’s a good devotion for us every day to commend our spirits into the hands of God. To do this reminds us of his promises to take care of us and how we can call on him at all times. Let’s say it together: **“Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit.”**

Paul wrote,

Philippians 3:12-14

**¹² 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.**

**¹³ 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,
¹⁴ I PRESS ON toward the goal for the PRIZE of the upward call of
God in Christ Jesus.**

When Paul wrote that he was not perfect, he meant that he isn’t always successful in remembering that “Christ Jesus has made me His own.” When your faith seems dry, you’re not alone. When you feel discouraged, you’re not alone. When you feel unlovable, you’re not alone. Because Jesus never forgets. He remembers you and me. He remembers you in your work, in your home, and wherever you are in between. He remembers you. And so with St. Paul we “press on” to make this remembrance our own.

Paul took confidence in his pursuit of growing in his walk with God because “Christ made me His own.” For what “lies behind” is the sin, the abyss of darkness, and all that “lies ahead” is the righteousness of Christ and the

resurrection on the Last Day. Paul “pressed on” for that “prize” and so may we. This is our “call”; this is our hope; this is our “prize” as we remember to whom we belong.

Friends in Christ, this week let us put our confidence in the things of Jesus, in his light, his love, his life, letting go of the things of this world that weigh us down.

This week let us be filled with confidence in our relationship with our Father in Heaven. For into his hands we have placed our hearts and he will watch over us until the end.

And this week let us find opportunity to share this good news with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.