

In our lives we face many challenges to provide for ourselves and our families. St. Paul faced similar challenges, but in his letter to the Philippians he explained how it's all a matter of perspective, that with Christ there's always hope, there's always victory.

## **OPENING PRAYER**

### **PHILIPPIANS 3:4b-14**

**“If anyone else thinks he has reason for 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; as to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. <sup>7</sup> But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> 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 <sup>9</sup> 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— <sup>10</sup> that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”**

St. Paul began this teaching, writing, **Philippians 3:4, “If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more....”**

He was saying, Look, if you think you're all that and a bag of chips, let me tell you, I've been there too. I know what it feels like to have the tiger by the tail, to be feeling good and looking even better! But in truth, I've discovered what you think you've got in this life is nothing. There's no security in it, there's no lasting sense of purpose in it, and there's nothing you've taken from this world that you'll take with you into eternity.

To illustrate what he was talking about Paul gave 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;  
<sup>6</sup>as to zeal,  
a persecutor of the church;  
as to righteousness,  
under the law blameless.”**

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 a Jew, an Israeli, indeed, not a proselyte who would've been circumcised as an adult, which was kind of like boasting, “I was baptized as an infant in the Lutheran church! I'm no a convert from another denomination that baptizes only adults!”

He then 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 loved the most. Also, Benjamin was the only one of Jacob's sons born in the Promised Land, and, finally, it was his tribe that held the position of honor on the battle-line. When Israel went to war all the other tribes cried out, “After thee, O Benjamin!”

Paul also 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 if you were a Jew from any other sect.

As for **“zeal,”** he was a Pharisee on spiritual steroids, oozing with pride, even persecuting and killing heretics, like Christians!

And Paul could confidently say there was not a single law which he had not followed, and if he had broken one, he had repented and offered up the appropriate sacrifice. He was righteous and blameless.

But in the end what did it get him? Despite his religious fervor, Paul found that he was not serving God, but in fact he was working against him, even killing God's children!

He was responsible for the martyrdom of Stephen, one of Christ's early disciples, and he blasphemed Christ's work. Thus he wrote,

### **Philippians 3:7-9**

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 Christ<sup>9</sup> 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: **"I count them as rubbish,"** which translated literally is "dung." Paul was saying his whole religion was cow poop because he did not have Jesus. In other words, it's not good enough to be "religious," it's pointless to be "spiritual" if you ain't got Jesus. In fact, Paul realized his self-righteousness got 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."** He discovered that everything worth having hinged on having a deep personal relationship with Jesus. He continued,

### **Philippians 3:10-11**

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 (Christ's) 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's a purgatory, and I asked her why. She said she wanted to be cleansed of all of her past doings as she prepared to meet God.

I thought what she said came from the right place, but I asked her, "How much cleansing is enough to meet a holy God?" She said she hadn't thought about it like that. So I offered her an alternative. I said, "If Jesus is your Lord, he lives in you and before God you are already cleansed. In fact, you're already 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 (Christ's) sufferings."** 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 for anyone! So Paul was talking about HOW he would suffer not about whether or not he would 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, be consumed by our pain, and give up hope. Or we can consciously choose to fall into the loving arms of Jesus, 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 raise us up from the grave with the words, **"Well done, good and faithful servant."** Paul wrote,

#### **Philippians 3:12-14**

<sup>12</sup> **"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.**

<sup>13</sup> **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,**

<sup>14</sup> **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 was not talking about perfectionism, but he was again talking about his relationship with Jesus. When he said he wasn't perfect, he meant that he sometimes forgot that **"Christ Jesus has made me His own."** Brothers and sisters in Christ, when our faith seems dry, let us remember that we're not alone. When we feel discouraged, let us remember that we're not alone. When we feel unlovable, let us remember that we're not alone. Because Jesus 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 too may we. This is our **"call"**; this is our hope; this is our **"prize"** as we remember to whom we belong.

We've got Jesus. Let that be our battle cry this week. I've got Jesus because he's got me. Please repeat it with me: **I've got Jesus because he's got me.**

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 he has promised to 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.