

Sermon on Philippians 3:4b-11  
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16th Sunday after Pentecost (C)  
September 29, 2019



*If anyone else thinks he has 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 regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.*

*But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, 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 is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

*(Philippians 3:4b-11)*

Even though we're not focusing on the Gospel in our message today, maybe we should start with that, because Jesus certainly shocks us today. He made a couple of seemingly impossible demands on his followers: 1) that they should hate their own families, and 2) that they had to give up everything they had.

How can Jesus say these things? Does he really mean it? Of course Jesus always means what he says. But how can he say it? Doesn't he want us to love our families? Doesn't he allow Christians to own possessions and property? We know in his Word he commands us to love our spouses, to love and cherish parents and children, and he tells us to manage our property wisely. So why does he say this now?

Here's where we can get some help from Paul. Paul tells us that he lived out those words of Jesus. He was one whose life and attitude did a 180 degree turn when he became a Christian. And so Paul's words and example can help us to understand what Jesus was talking about when he makes those shocking, impossible-sounding demands the book of Luke. From Paul's words, we see that

## **In Jesus, you give up everything and gain everything**

### **Identity - Trust - Life goals**

#### I. Identity

What makes you "you"? Who are you, really? And we respond in predictable ways. Our names, which includes our family name. Our jobs. Something unique about us, something we have done or someone we have known. I'm so-and-so's friend, I worked there, I teach here or I'm manager of this or pastor of that.

Paul had a whole list of things he could use to identify himself before he knew Jesus.

***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; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.*** Paul defined himself by his ancestors, his pride to be a part of the chosen people of Israel. Beyond that, he defined himself by his abilities and talents, by his morality, by being part his chosen group "Pharisees", that is, those who (at least in their own minds) were really and seriously devoted to following the law of God.

But now he says: ***Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish...***

He lost it all. The Pharisees, his old friends, despised and persecuted him now. They considered him the biggest lawbreaker of all. His own people persecuted and tried to kill him. And now he knew he had not really been righteous, but the chief of sinners. But he didn't care. For he had found something overwhelmingly greater, a new source of identity that brought him joy: "Knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."

How do you see yourself? What makes you proud to be you? Ancestry? Family? Talents? Personal accomplishments? Compared to Jesus, Paul says, they're all garbage. Abilities can fade, accomplishments are forgotten, even family can disown you. Jesus' love for you is so much better. All those other things only connect you to people. Knowing Jesus connects you to God himself. To be baptized in his name, to be called a "Christian" is to have a divine title that is worth so much more than any human one.

Paul isn't the only Christian who had to deny his identity, and his family, to follow Christ. Plenty of other Christians have and still do today. They are fulfillments of Jesus' word. What about you? If you have a family that does not forsake you for your allegiance to Jesus—praise him for that extra wonderful blessing. Praise him and love them! But even then, his words remind you: they're not your ultimate priority—he is. No one else can give you the name that he can give you—child of God, blood-cleansed saint. All our other identities can be lost, they are ultimately expendable. That name you have gained in Jesus is the one that nothing can take away.

### **Trust & confidence**

Closely related to identity is trust. All those things that Paul identified himself by were also what he trusted in to make himself right before God. But now in Jesus he had found something far better. ***I may gain Christ 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 and is by faith.***

Paul was not exaggerating when he said that if there could be anyone who could have found righteousness before God on their own, it would have been him. Martin Luther once said

something similar; he said that if any monk could have been saved through monkery it would have been him, because he was the best and hardest working monk there ever was. But Luther found out that even all of that wasn't enough for God.

When you pray to God, do you tell him to bless you because of how special you are? When you are troubled by your sins, do you try to soothe your conscience by remembering all the good things you did and feel as though this makes up for them? When you think of death, do you calm your fears by telling yourself that you're at least a lot better person than most other people are?

Friends, I pray that you don't. Because when it comes to standing before God, there's no room for those things. Those human-invented excuses, rationalizations, will fill you with doubt and ultimately end in disaster and damnation. They don't meet God's holy standard. There's only one foundation you can stand on in God's presence, and that is Jesus Christ, **"the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith."** To be dressed in the pure, white, spotless clothes Jesus gave you by faith and through your baptism--that's the only way to present yourself before God.

Jesus strips away all the rest. He tears of all your pride, all your self-focused good feelings. Knowing Jesus means you and I must lose all the pride in family, money, talents and accomplishments. We must lose all that. But Jesus gives us something far better than those things can--a saving righteousness that leads to everlasting life. In him we lose everything but we also gain everything.

### Life goals

And that means gaining--and losing--your life's goals in Christ as well. ***I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.***

Paul gives us his long range goal--resurrection of the body and life everlasting. But what about in the short term? **"the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death"** Paul's goal was to be like Jesus, and not only in loving people like Jesus did but also in suffering, and yes, even dying like Jesus did--giving up his life for his Savior just as his Savior had sacrificed his life for him. Jesus said it, remember? Hate even your own life, carry your cross? Can you hear the echoes of those words in Paul's? "I want to be like Jesus--in every way, even the suffering and the dying."

But what about you? Can we, should we have it as our goal to SUFFER like Jesus, to die even? How about we put it this way: that we make it our goal, like Paul's, to proclaim Christ, to be like him, to praise his name, to follow his Word wherever it may lead us; and we can be confident that if we're doing those things the suffering will find us all on its own. Even Paul didn't go around saying, "Here I am, whip me." But he was wise enough to know that by being Jesus' apostle, he was inviting suffering on himself, and so he would find

tremendous joy in it knowing that this suffering connected him to his Savior. And so can you.

Following Jesus means that the life goals that come from our sinful nature have to be lost. To triumph over everyone else...to have everyone admiring and looking up to you...to be able to have all the money you could ever want and find security in your wealth--those goals and others like them are ones that Jesus strips away.

We lose everything--everything our sinful nature wanted to gain. But we also gain everything that is infinitely greater. "To attain to the resurrection of the dead." Not just to suffer like Jesus, or even die for him, but to rise in him. To conquer death as he did. To live forever as he did and he will. To stand on the other side of your grave and laugh at how powerless it was compared the strength of the Savior who bought you and loved you. Those are goals to cherish. Those are goals to strive for.

### **Conclusion**

In 1949 when the Chinese communists were overrunning the land, their forces overran a Christian seminary. The students were sentenced to hard labor in prison. One of the students had been due to be married the very next day. His bride-to-be was only allowed to visit him in prison for one short visit each year. Every year, at the end of the visit, the prison warden offered the man a choice. "You can go home with your bride," he said, "if you are willing to renounce Christianity." Every year for the next 30 years, the man's answer was simple: "No. How could I betray the Savior who loved me?" Finally after 30 years, bent double from hard labor, the man was released and was able to move to Hong Kong to marry and live with his earthly bride.

Jesus never said it would be easy. He said, rather, that it no matter how hard it was, no matter how hard it is to be his disciple, he promises you that it will be worth it--always and forever. May he give us the courage, the conviction, the faith to follow him in all things, to give up everything and gain everything that is far better, so that we can be with him in glory. Amen.