

I.N.I.

Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost
November 3, 2013
Philippians 3:7-14

In Christ Jesus, who has taken hold of us so that we may take hold of everlasting life in heaven, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

A delinquent church-goer once said to his pastor, “Pastor, I always know in advance what you are going to say in your sermon.” That was this man’s excuse for not coming to church to hear the Word.

The pastor replied, “Why, thank you for the compliment. Just read what Paul wrote in Phil. 3:1.”

What did Paul write? A literal translation is this: **“FINALLY, MY BROTHERS, REJOICE, BE GLAD IN THE LORD; FOR ME TO WRITE TO YOU THE SAME THINGS AGAIN AND AGAIN IS NOT TROUBLESOME, BECAUSE FOR YOU, IT MAKES YOU LIKE ASPHALT.”** That is firm, certain, sure, immovable, a safeguard.

Now to be sure, the pastor who is ill-prepared, and uses the same old clichés; who never varies his introduction or the endings to his sermons, who preaches in a slow, monotone, lifeless way, may not look upon that response of his member as a compliment.

But it is a compliment for the pastor who consistently, week after week, Sunday after Sunday proclaims the Word of God in its truth and purity. One who does not mince words when declaring the Law: showing to himself and to his hearers their utter worthlessness and helplessness before God without Christ. The pastor who is consistent in his condemnation of the morality of the day (that changes with the whims and fancies of society), who calls sin, sin; and who never fails to bring the soothing balm of the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus that heals the spiritual scars and sores will look upon it as a compliment. It is a complement for the pastor who mounts the pulpit and every Sunday directs the hearts and minds of the members to the Lamb of God who has borne the guilt and paid for the sins of not only the members but of every person in this world by His sacrifice on the cross. It is a compliment to the pastor who week after week points the members away from the distractions, cares and worries of this world, away from themselves and points to Christ and the cross and the glorious treasure that awaits them in their heavenly home.

For that is the Christian’s ultimate desire and goal—to live forever with his Savior in his Father’s home above. May our sermon study this morning renew, quicken, and ignite that desire in our hearts.

Our sermon theme this morning is this:

JESUS, OUR PRICELESS TREASURE!

I: All that we are, have, and can acquire without knowing Jesus is worthless trash.

If human beings were the ones to determine who would make it into heaven, the Apostle Paul, prior to his conversion, would have made it hands down. He would easily have been voted into the “Good Works Hall of Fame.” In the verses just prior to our text Paul sets forth some of the reasons why he could boast about his life; why he could put confidence in his flesh, his works. He says: **THOUGH I ALSO MIGHT HAVE CONFIDENCE IN THE FLESH. IF ANYONE ELSE THINKS HE MAY HAVE CONFIDENCE IN THE FLESH, I MORE SO: CIRCUMCISED THE EIGHTH DAY, OF THE STOCK OF ISRAEL, OF THE TRIBE OF BENJAMIN, A HEBREW OF THE HEBREWS; CONCERNING THE LAW, A PHARISEE; CONCERNING ZEAL, PERSECUTING THE CHURCH; CONCERNING THE RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH IS IN THE LAW, BLAMELESS.**

Paul’s way of life prior to his conversion was externally faultless. He lived according to the letter of the Law. A better man one could not find. Surely, all of this, his former way of life must mean some profit for Paul in his obtaining eternal life!

But what does Paul say in the first verse of our text? **BUT WHAT THINGS WERE GAIN TO ME (was to my profit), THESE I HAVE COUNTED LOSS FOR CHRIST.**

Paul's former way of life; his outward perfect adherence to the laws is now like excess baggage which is thrown out in order to save a sinking ship. It is useless. It is worth nothing when compared to Christ. Paul goes even further: **YET INDEED I ALSO COUNT ALL THINGS LOSS FOR THE EXCELLENCE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST JESUS MY LORD, FOR WHOM I HAVE SUFFERED THE LOSS OF ALL THINGS, AND COUNT THEM AS RUBBISH, THAT I MAY GAIN CHRIST.**

Paul realized that everything he had in this life: all that he was, all that he had, or all that he could acquire without knowing Christ, was worthless trash. All a loss!

Don't get Paul wrong. He fully realized that all that he had—his goods, his brilliant mind, his body were all gifts from his loving God. In that sense these things are not to be despised, but thankfully received. But all of these things, everything and anything in the world--you name it--is trash, worthless garbage without knowing Christ.

Paul here uses the word for dung, manure and for the scraps that are thrown out for the dogs to eat. These words should help put our lives in proper perspective; help put our priorities as Christians in their right order. All that we are morally, mentally and physically is nothing if we are not in Christ. All that we have—our homes, our cars, clothes, appliances, electronics, and the list goes on and on is worthless if we do not believe in Jesus. And all that we can acquire—wealth, health, respect, recreation, wisdom is but rubbish if we are not children of God through faith in Jesus.

What did Jesus say? **"FOR WHAT PROFIT IS IT TO A MAN IF HE GAINS THE WHOLE WORLD, AND LOSES HIS OWN SOUL?"**

Paul rejoiced in the fact that he had lost all things for his Lord. He had no wealth, no home. He had no prestige in the eyes of the world. He even had no freedom. As we heard last week he wrote this letter to the Philippians while imprisoned in Rome. He had learned to willingly give up all things for Christ, and especially he learned that he had no righteousness of his own that comes through keeping the law.

Paul writes that he wants to **BE FOUND IN HIM, NOT HAVING MY OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS, WHICH IS FROM THE LAW, BUT THAT WHICH IS THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST, THE RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH IS FROM GOD BY FAITH.**

The only righteousness Paul could have before God is the righteousness that came from God and that is through Christ. The atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross takes away our sins, paid for them in full and Jesus' perfect life of obedient love fulfilled the Law. This righteousness of Jesus—the forgiveness He earned and His perfection--is ours through faith.

This leads us to our second point:

II: By faith in the Gospel we obtain this Treasure as a free gift of God.

This righteousness earned for us by Jesus is ours through faith. Our heavenly Father looks upon us and all believers in Christ as being holy, righteous because He looks at us through His Son. He looks at us with our sins forgiven, our stains removed, our hearts washed clean and being accredited, being filled with Christ's holiness.

Having this righteousness means that we will be moved to want to live as redeemed slaves lovingly serving our Savior. Paul writes: **THAT I MAY KNOW HIM AND THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION, AND THE FELLOWSHIP OF HIS SUFFERINGS, BEING CONFORMED TO HIS DEATH.**

Even as Christ died and then rose from the dead to a new life, so also we through Christ have died and have risen again to a new life of serving Him, a life of knowing Christ and of partaking in the power of His resurrection. With Christ and His Word dwelling in us we have been given the ability to turn away from sin and temptation, to withdraw our affections from the materialism of this world, and to fell Satan with one little word; to live in Christ and to live for Christ.

Yes, we as Christians share in the power of Jesus' resurrection. With Christ, nothing is impossible. The Gospel is proclaimed and the Word is spread. Souls are won. Lives are changed. Congregations are established. All through the power of His resurrection.

But we as Christians also share in His suffering and death. That means repenting of our sins and putting our old Adam to death. It means not walking with the crowd when the walk is toward God-displeasing activities. It may mean enduring ridicule because of our faith in Jesus. It means giving of ourselves and of our lives for Him.

III: While here on earth we continuously strive for the eternal possession of that Treasure

Through faith in Jesus we have obtained this Treasure, but we will not eternally possess Him and Life until we pass from this world. By living in faith we daily strive to eternally possess this Treasure. Paul said: **NOT THAT I HAVE ALREADY ATTAINED, OR AM ALREADY PERFECTED; BUT I PRESS ON, THAT I MAY LAY HOLD OF THAT FOR WHICH CHRIST JESUS HAS ALSO LAID HOLD OF ME.**

As we said in our greeting: Christ has taken hold of us, so that we might take hold of everlasting life in heaven. Notice it is Christ who has taken hold of us and Peter tells us we are **KEPT BY THE POWER OF GOD THROUGH FAITH FOR SALVATION READY TO BE REVEALED IN THE LAST TIME.**

Paul hadn't yet taken hold of this Treasure completely, eternally; but to make sure that he would he said: **BUT ONE THING I DO, FORGETTING THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE BEHIND AND REACHING FORWARD TO THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE AHEAD, I PRESS TOWARD THE GOAL FOR THE PRIZE OF THE UPWARD CALL OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS.**

Paul will not look back upon his former way of life. He will not look back upon his works, his deeds, his being born a Jew. He will not look back upon the things of this life that so easily entrap and ensnare us; but he looks ahead to the goal, to the end of this life which brings to him and to all Christians the Prize; the Treasure-----everlasting life with Jesus!

We are now living our life, don't look back at this world and the things of this world, like Lot's wife, but straining and stretching every spiritual muscle we run for the finish line and obtain the Prize. We do that through the continual hearing and reading of His Word.

It does no good to brood over and look back at past sins and failures, for that leads only to despair. They have all been completely forgiven in the blood of Christ. Nor does it benefit us to pat ourselves on the back for past accomplishments. That leads to pride and spiritual laziness.

Instead, we focus on Jesus and on heaven and strive for spiritual maturity, until we finally take full possession of the eternal Treasure. That is why Christ has redeemed us and that is why God has called us to be His own—**“to live under Him in His kingdom and to serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and joy.”**

Amen.