

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Trinity 5, July 21, 2019
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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 224 (238:1) 380, 405:1-5, 405:6
Lessons: Lamentations 3:22-32; Acts 5:34-42; Luke 9:18-26.
Text: Philippians 3:8-14
Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Fellow Redeemed in Christ our Risen Savior,

In the first part of one of our hymns we sing,
“What is the world to me with all its vaunted pleasure
When you, and you alone, Lord Jesus, are my Treasure.” (The Lutheran Hymnal 430)

When we sing such words as believers in Christ, we are not boasting about the degree of sanctification we have reached. We are simply stating how a believer in Christ ought to feel about Jesus.

We greatly admire the Apostle Paul who could say, *“For me, to live is Christ...”* Philippians 1:21. (KJV) When we compare our life with Paul’s life of service to the Lord, we feel very inadequate. We feel very dissatisfied with our life. We say this with humbleness of mind because of the weakness of our sinful flesh. As we learn more about what our Savior has done for us, we should pray that our love for him will increase so that we can show how much we appreciate his love to us.

To help us in doing this, let us learn from our text,

HOW MUCH CHRIST SHOULD MEAN TO US.

- 1. Compared to Christ and righteousness through faith in him, all else is rubbish.**
- 2. Through faith in Christ we attain to the resurrection from the dead and eternal life.**
- 3. With all our zeal we should strive toward the goal of heaven.**

Before our text Paul makes this comparison, *“Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.”* Philippians 3:7 (NIV) Then in our text he emphasizes that same thought. *“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.”* Philippians 3:8-9 (NIV) What did Paul have in his life when he was still known as Saul of Tarsus? Was his former life before his conversion so miserable? No, not as the world would judge his life. Saul from the city of Tarsus was a freeborn Roman citizen. This in itself was important. He also was a Jew with a proud heritage who traced his descent from the tribe of Benjamin. As a Jew he had an outstanding record. He was a Pharisee, a member of the strictest sect of Jews. He had a fine education in the Law of Moses and in all the traditions of the Jewish elders. His zeal for keeping the law was as great as anyone could have. No one could have worked any harder than he did to persecute the followers of Christ. Saul was ‘somebody’ in this world and he had a reputation as a leader among the Pharisees.

Why, then, does Paul say in our text that he counted all these things as worthless and useless, as rubbish? The big difference in his attitude came, of course, when he was brought to faith in Christ. At the very height of his frenzied activity in persecuting Christ and his followers, God brought him to faith in Jesus on the way to Damascus. From then on he was an altogether different person. What he had counted as being very important before, was now considered nothing better than rubbish or refuse. He became the great Apostle Paul who devoted his life to Christ and the spreading of the Gospel. What had been so important in his life before conversion, he now counted as worthless rubbish. His former friends, of course, did not agree with him and they let him know it. He tells us about this in these words: ***“We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. ... Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world,”*** 1 Corinthians 4:9b-13 (NIV)

What was so important, so precious, that Paul would suffer in this manner for Jesus’ sake? Paul says, ***“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.”*** Paul’s own righteousness that he had when he tried his best to keep the Law of Moses was no longer of any satisfaction to him. He had given up in trying to earn his way to heaven by good works. In Christ he had found the righteousness that is completely foreign to man, the righteousness that cannot be earned by man. This is the righteousness that comes from God that Christ earned by his work of redemption.

What Paul attempted to do before his conversion was not perfect and therefore not pleasing to God. Any one of us in trying to keep God’s holy commandments always falls far short of perfection. ***“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”*** Romans 3:23 (NIV) But what Jesus did in his holy life was absolutely perfect. The holy Son of God never sinned. Besides that, he paid for sins by his innocent suffering and death. In Christ ***“we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding,”*** Ephesians 1:7-8 (NIV). Jesus ***“humbled himself and because obedient to death – even death on a cross!”*** Philippians 2:8 (NIV). This is how Jesus earned that righteousness of which Paul speaks in our text. God declares us sinners righteous in his sight for Jesus’ sake. And this righteousness is ours through faith in Christ Jesus. Paul writes, ***“We maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law,”*** Romans 3:28 (NIV). When God the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts through the means of grace, then we have the righteousness that is declared by God to sinners for Jesus’ sake in the Gospel. Having that righteousness, our sins are no longer counted against us and we can stand blameless before God on Judgment Day. We see, then, why Paul counted everything else in this world as rubbish compared to this righteousness in Christ.

Paul further describes the blessings that follow as a result of being justified by faith. **He tells us that through faith in Christ we attain to the resurrection from the dead and eternal life.**

2.

Above all else Paul was interested in this: ***“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.”*** To know Jesus as his Savior, his Lord and Redeemer, and to appreciate ever more fully all that Jesus did for him, was one of many blessings Paul speaks of as a result of coming to faith in Christ. Another blessing is to know the power of Christ’s resurrection, that is, to be assured by Christ’s resurrection from the dead that he is the Son of God the Father in heaven. Christ’s resurrection is our assurance that we stand justified before God. ***“He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification,”*** Romans 4:25 (NIV). Another blessing is to be assured that our resurrection on the Last Day is a sure thing because Christ rose from the dead. Jesus said, ***“Because I live, you also will live,”*** John 14:19 (NIV). Another blessing for believers in Christ is to suffer with Christ. It should not be considered something strange that believers in Christ have to suffer because of their faith in him. Peter writes, ***“Dear friends, do not***

be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed,” 1 Peter 4:12-13 (NIV). In being persecuted for preaching the Gospel, Paul knew what it meant to suffer with Christ. All believers in Christ should be willing to suffer all kinds of tribulations for the sake of Christ and his Word, even death. Peter writes, *“Even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed,”* 1 Peter 3:14 (NIV). We should gladly bear a cross after Jesus, if only we might finally attain to the resurrection from the dead and have eternal life. Nothing in this world really counts for anything if we do not finally get to heaven. Jesus says, *“What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?”* Mark 8:36 (NIV).

Finally, Paul expresses what every believer in Christ should strive to do. **With all our zeal we should strive toward the goal of heaven.**

3.

Paul writes, *“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.”* Paul says that he had not already reached the goal of being in heaven. He had not yet entered upon that perfection that we shall have in heaven. He still had to battle against Satan and his flesh. *“I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing,”* Romans 7:18-19 (NIV) Paul still had to do battle with Satan and his sinful nature. But Christ had made him his own when he was converted. Now he was eager to get to the end of this life and partake of the joys and glory of heaven.

Paul continues in our text, *“Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”* Like a runner in a race, Paul says that he would exert every effort to win the race, to reach the goal. In doing this, he would forget what was behind, that is, all the disagreeable things, the tribulations and sufferings. All he had in mind now was to win the prize, to obtain the victory, to gain eternal life in heaven.

We too have to learn this. We have to keep before our mind’s eye that glorious goal of eternal life with all its joys and blessedness. That means we dare not become too wrapped up in the things of this life, our daily work of earning a living, and the pleasures of this life. As followers of Christ we should know that there is nothing in this world that is worth much. All material things, even if they give us some satisfaction here, will be destroyed by fire at the end of the world. Paul says, *“Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory,”* Colossians 3:2-4 (NIV). The only thing that really counts is that we rise from the dead on the Last Day and go to eternal life in heaven. What joys we then will have! Paul says, *“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us,”* Romans 8:18 (NIV). In all our tribulations and sufferings for Jesus’ sake in this life, may this be uppermost in our mind. Amen.

(Reprinted from July 16, 2006)