

“What’s Really Important?”
(Philippians 3:1-21)
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Introduction:

¹ Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.

² Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. ³ For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— ⁴ though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. 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. ¹⁵ Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. ¹⁶ Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

¹⁷ Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸ For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Many people have their sights set on the wrong things.

In this passage Paul is trying to show the Philippian Christians the errors of the false teachers that were trying to influence them in the wrong way. These false teachers were called Judaizers, so called Jewish Christians who demanded that if you wanted to be a true Christian you'd have to become a Jew as well, particularly circumcision. And so these teachers were trying to establish their credibility based on human achievements rather than on Christ. Paul sees through all of it and begins his argument. And he begins the argument on their terms. So it's like he's saying, "Okay, you want to talk about pedigree and personal achievements, okay, bring it on."

And Paul says that these guys are not genuine Christians, because their brand of Christianity has everything to do with themselves and nothing to do with God. But Paul's brand of Christianity, the true Christianity is like this.

1. we who worship by the Spirit of God
2. we who glory in Christ Jesus
3. we who put no glory in the flesh

The Christianity that Paul mentions is so utterly different from what the Judaizers were proposing. And he had to address it because nothing short of the eternal salvation of the people were at stake. Folks listen...if you and I believe the wrong gospel, even with good intentions, it will not get us into heaven. And the gospel the Judaizers were presenting was a message based on merit and achievement and the gospel Paul presents is on based on the merit's of Christ and our faith in Him.

So Paul begins to give a personal resume of his life achievements to show the incredible beauty of the gospel and the wonder of Christ.

Most of us have written a resume at some time or another. And we all know that this resume, at least when it's your first resume and there's not a lot to write about, you have to make it stand out, so the HR dude will take notice and give consideration. So we put down all of our crowing achievements onto this piece of paper. We list our education, the schools we've graduated from, the college we might have been in, the degree (w/ or w/o honors) that we've earned. We'll list the professional certifications we've earned as well, in software, in accounting, and what not. We'll list our work-related volunteer or co-op experiences, and of course all our previous employment. So some of you might have a resume that can hardly fit a page and some of you might have a resume that's several pages thick. But on that page summarizes, in a professional sense, all that you are. It expresses your finest. It expresses your value. It expresses not only your past, but your future.

Let's take a look at Paul's resume and he groups them into two categories. Pedigree and personal achievement. Let's look at his pedigree.

1. Circumcised on the eight day--not circumcised in an invalid way like pagans
2. of the people of Israel—Of all the different nations that God could have chosen, he chose a 70 year old pagan named Abraham and through him began the nation of Israel. Unlike Gentile converts to Judaism, Paul is a descendent, a member of that very special people
3. of the tribe of Benjamin--not a disreputable tribe, one of two tribes that came from the favored wife of our forefather Jacob/Israel. Leah (10) and Rachel (2). the tribe of Saul. And who was the first king of Israel? It was Saul. So it's not a far stretch of the imagination to name your child after him.
4. a Hebrew of Hebrews--not one who adopted Hellenistic ways, orthodox. (I'm not a Korean by birth only, who can't even speak, read or write Korean, and become totally Westernized, I'm a Korean, living in the West, that hasn't been totally absorbed by Western culture and influence)

These four things, Paul did not have one ounce of control over. Just like you and me, we have absolutely no control over our race, our gender, our name, our lineage, our country of birth, or to be born in rags or riches, to be born with tons of natural talents or gifts or very little. These are all given to us at birth. But the funny thing is that we still boast in them. Maybe you came from

money. Many your parents told you of the great line you've descended from. Maybe you've had every birth benefit possible handed to you. And yet, strangely, we take credit for them, and boast. We look down on those who don't share the same privileges. And people are like that. They've always been like that. And what does Paul say? I've got a rich heritage too.

Then he moves from pedigree to personal achievements. All of these are by his own choice.

1. in regard to the law, a Pharisee--this one being the most faithful to scripture. He chose the life path of a religious leaders. An expert in the scriptures. Taught under one of the greatest teachers of his day, Gamaliel.
2. As a Jew, he was fiercely zealous in persecuting the church. He ain't no nominal Jew. Or a Jew by birth only. He not a Sunday Christian, or a cultural Catholic. He's the dude, if he were a Muslim, that would be strictly adhering to the fasting regulations of Ramaddan, he would have trekked to Mecca yearly, he would have been first to line up for Alquida and volunteer for a suicide mission.
3. as for legalistic righteousness, faultless—with a straight face, he was able to say that he has w/o fault obeyed all of the laws of Moses. Which shouldn't surprise us. Remember the rich young ruler who questioned Jesus about eternal life? And Jesus asks him about the Law of Moses and he says, w/o out blinking an eyeless. "All of these I have kept since I was a boy."

Friends, in this day and age, you and I are more prone to boast about our personal achievements rather than in our pedigree. There are a lot of accomplished people in the ranks. We have PhDs, not a few Masters, many of us hold professional degrees and certifications in finance and health care. Most of us are professionals, we're business owners, we're entrepreneurs, we live on the good side of town. We drive nice cars, we pay our taxes, we have healthy portfolios, we married well, we have or will have beautiful children, we've mingled with the in-crowd. And we can put all of these crowning achievements onto our mantles and begin to think because of these things that, I'm important. I have value. I'm a good person. I matter. Even God can't overlook these things. And that's the attitude of most people. They assemble all of these supposedly important and valuable things and we throw them onto our life's resume.

Some of you might be thinking. "I've worked my tail off from as long as I can remember for these things and you're telling me they're not important?" Yes, that's exactly what I'm telling you. If that is how you've lived, and at one point or another, that is how all of us lived, you've been duped, suckered, hoodwinked, fooled, tricked, lied to, taken for a ride... shall I go on?

If that wasn't it, what is it?

The only thing that really matters, that's really important is not pedigree or personal achievement. It's a person. It's Jesus.

If you achieve all that you wanted to achieve and fail to find a person, you have failed in everything.

Let's look at what Paul writes. And I want for all of us to see the progression, the building up, the crescendo in his next statement.

After he lists the things he thought were important before he became a Christian, all of his pedigree and personal achievements, he says that he considers them a loss. A loss. It was for nothing. It was a waste of time. For me to put value in those things, it was foolishness.

Well that's easy for many of us to say. Before you and I became Christians, we were chasing after all the wrong things, weren't we? All value system was all out of whack. God wasn't even on the radar. And so we can look back to your pre-Christian days and say, "yeah, all of that stuff, that I thought was so important, it's worthless, it's a loss." I hope we can all say that because our values and life direction has changed. What used to be unimportant is now of the highest importance, isn't it?

But let's follow the progression in Paul's argument.

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.

In verse 8 he adds a word here. He adds the word "everything." What is everything? Everything is everything. Verse 7 explicitly refers to all of his Jewish accomplishments. But everything, includes everything. At the time of this writing Paul had been a Christian for quite some time. Over twenty years. And for his twenty years he had done quite a lot as a Christian, for God, for the church. Let's just take a brief look at his accomplishments.

1. Saw Jesus.
2. heard voice of Jesus.
3. Wrote bible
4. Best selling author
5. Planted scores of churches
6. Saved and baptized countless believers.
7. Was a pioneer missionary
8. Suffered, tortured and imprisoned for Christ
9. Took on call of celibacy for Jesus and his ministry

Not bad, not too bad, eh? All of those things he did as a Christian is included in the word "everything". Why is that? Why does Paul think this way? We'll see in a second.

But what about you and me? Surely we can boast in some of our Christian achievements can't we? Can't we look at the children and youth we taught, the praise we've led, the committees we've been on, the mission trips attended, the bible studies accumulated, the money given, the countless hours, and be a little proud of those things? Paul says, No. Those are loss.

To Paul all of those things aren't just loss, they're rubbish.

I consider them rubbish (dung) *skubula* - this is a land fill where all waste, human and decaying meat and vegetables would be tossed. It's our green bin contents. Now I don't know what goes into your green bin, but you want to know what goes into mine? Used coffee grinds, chicken bones, rotten vegetables, apple cores and orange peels, and last but not least, dog poop. Take all of your pedigree, your crowning achievements before becoming a Christian and since then. Place in on one side of a scale. Then go to my background, or rummage through my green bin and grab a pile of dog poop and put it on the other side of the scale until it evens out. That's Paul's take on all of those things we think are really important. Is that the same attitude we have?

What's the secret? What's going on inside of the mind of a Paul?

One word: Jesus. Look at the passage again with me.

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.

In the repetition of Christ in this passage Paul is making a couple of statements.

1. Christ is of infinite worth.
2. If anything gets in the way of salvation in Christ, it's worth nothing.

Let's talk about the second thing first. Paul knows for certain that everything he accomplished before he became a Christian had no value in being accepted by God. And most of us know that too. But what we might tend to do as Christians is to think that God will accept me more, love me more, because I did so many great things for him as a Christian. And what Paul is saying is no way. There is nothing pre or post Christian that we can do that can contribute to our standing before God, because all of it as it says in verse 9 is by faith in Christ.

Now let's talk about the first thing. Christ is of infinite worth.

Paul says, 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.

the power that was experienced in raising the most condemned man ever from the dead, Paul wants to experience. Perhaps it is the power that accompanies the Christian resurrection, by being made alive in Christ.

fellowship of sharing in his sufferings--is this what you dream about? Is this what you long for ?

becoming like him in his death.

What Paul is saying in these words is that there is nothing as supremely precious and valuable than Jesus. There is nothing that he prizes higher or treasures more. There is nothing that his heart aches and yearns for more than to know Jesus, to be found in Jesus, to suffer for Jesus and to be with Jesus. Ch. 1 he said to live is Christ, to die is gain.

Mother Teresa – “you realize Jesus is all you need, when Jesus is all you have.”

Conclusion:

In the coming months we'll be starting a journey of spirituality. And the goal is not to be more spiritual. The goal is not have attained some measure of spirituality. The goal is not to have finished the bible, or prayed more, or sinned less or whatever.

The beginning, middle and end of spirituality is Jesus.