

Count it all as loss

- Philippians 3:4-9
- Remember in the verse 2 of this chapter, Paul railed against the circuit-riding Judaizers who were coming to Philippi and every town. They were spreading their dangerous and destructive doctrine that is present in every world religion outside of Christianity: that salvation is a do-it-yourself project. Paul responds with three characteristics of a Christian: we worship by the spirit of God, we glory in Christ Jesus, and we put NO confidence in the flesh.
- I had a friend named Jack Robinson growing up. It's true. (You millennials might not know that people used to use that name to explain quickness; "Are you going to the beach?" "Just as quick as you can say Jack Robinson.") Well, my friend was quick, but not always as quick as I was. We competed in everything. Running. Throwing sticks. Climbing trees. We even competed in selling seeds door to door, from the American Seed Company. But every time we competed, the winner had bragging rights. The winner would always brag about how much he trounced the other, and the loser would always have an excuse for why he did not win. Bottom line? We wanted to be the best. Paul did, too. Even as a child. Here he proves it to us, and says, "You think you have reason to brag? Step aside, son. You ain't got nothing." (I've noticed that when Paul brags, he uses poor grammar a lot of times, just to make a point). Paul said, "Let me tell you about a man who was a legend in his own time. That man, my boy, would be me." Paul's bragging is to make a point that though he climbed to the top of the ladder, the very top, he discovered it as leaning against the wrong thing. Let's look at Paul's resume and then at his radical reversal.
- **Paul's Resume**
- In verses 5 and 6, Paul lists 7 reasons why he was a Jewish rock star, and why every little Jewish boy wanted to be just like him when they grew up. The first four reasons come from his heritage and the last three come from his own personal achievements.
- **Eight-dayer.** Paul says, I was the best at being circumcised. None of this conversion to Judaism later in life; no, I was BORN a Jew and I was circumcised exactly as every Jewish boy was supposed to be: I was an insider from birth.
- **Of THE people:** Paul says, I was born into the right race, in the covenant of the people of Israel. I was pure blooded, a thoroughbred, one of the offspring of Abraham.
- **Of THE tribe of Benjamin.** You remember that Benjamin and Joseph were Jacob's only two sons born to his favorite wife, Rachel. And Rachel gave her life giving birth to Benjamin. With her dying words, she named him Benoni, son of my sorrow. But Jacob overruled and named him Benjamin, son of my right hand. It was the tribe of Benjamin that remained faithful to Judah and the house of David, and that went into exile with Judah and came back with Judah. It was the tribe of Benjamin from which God chose the first King of Israel, Saul, and it is entirely possible that Paul's parents named him Saul, after that first king.
- **Hebrew of Hebrews:** though he was born in Tarsus, Paul was a Hebrew, as were his parents before him for generations. He spoke Hebrew, unlike many of the Jews from the diaspora who spoke only Greek. Paul was also trained by one of the most esteemed Rabbi's, Gamaliel, which would have been the equivalent of the best private school training available in all of Israel.
- So far, Paul had nothing to do with any of those things. It would like you or me bragging about where we were born, who our ancestors were, or how our parents decided to educate us. Those things were beyond our control and therefore we have no reason to boast. Or to feel superior to others who are different! But sadly, that's the way many people, including some Christians, live. Now let's look at three personal accomplishments of Paul.
- **As to the law, a Pharisee:** the Pharisees began after the Jews returned from exile. The word Pharisee means "separated one," and the group grew to about 6,000 strong in its heyday. They were the elite Jews, and were VERY serious about keeping the rules. I don't have evidence to prove that they were all first-borns, but probably the second-borns didn't last long. The Pharisees

separated themselves from others, the unclean or the Jews who did not observe the commandments of Moses, and of course, the Pharisees added to those commandments so the number of people they associated with grew smaller and smaller. The Pharisees, you remember, were besides themselves when they saw the disciples of Jesus plucking heads of grain and eating them on the Sabbath. Jesus tried to teach the un-teachable, saying that man was not made for the Sabbath, the Sabbath was made for man. And He said, "So, the Son of Man is Lord, even of the Sabbath." Well, Paul was a Pharisee, and he said in Acts 23, he was the son of Pharisees. There was nobody better at keeping the law.

- **As to zeal, a persecutor of the church.** Some of the Pharisees were fearful of the crowds, fearful of the popularity of the Nazarene called Jesus, and His followers. Not Paul. He was the most zealous of all the Pharisees in ridding the land of the scourge of Christianity. He knew better than anyone what a plague these people were, and the only answer was to eliminate them. He got his start that day when one of them, a man named Stephen, preached a sermon that started off very well. Stephen talked about the people of God, the great patriarchs of the faith. But then everything went all wrong, and this Stephen character was calling all of them stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart! Then this character looked up at the sky and said he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. That's when the crowd went crazy and men began to pick up rocks and huge stones, and Paul was standing there telling people to let him hold their coats. They could throw much better without their coats on. And they crushed Stephen to death, while Paul watched with satisfaction. That's when his murderous campaign to annihilate all Christians began in earnest. You want to talk to me about zeal? Paul says, "There was no one like me."
- **As to righteousness under the law, blameless.** If you could have asked someone back then, was Paul a godly man, they would have said, "None more godly! He keeps the Sabbath. He washes his hands the proper way. He gives alms to the poor. He prays in the temple. No one keeps the commandments like Paul does." Righteousness under the law. Remember the rich young ruler? He asked Jesus, "Good teacher, what must I DO to inherit eternal life?" Even the question betrays a man-centered, works-based religion. What must I do? Jesus played along. He said, you know the commandments. Have you kept them? "Oh yes! I have kept all of them since my youth." Jesus didn't say, "Well, Ok, then. I guess you'll be in heaven!" No, the Bible says Jesus, looking at the man, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing. Go and sell everything you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." And the rich young ruler walked away sadly, because he had great possessions. Jesus said in effect, the problem is not with your actions. The problem is with your heart. You are unrighteous and don't even know it. You don't need to DO anything to gain eternal life. Except to lay down whatever is keeping you from following Me. A rule-keeper has a scorecard in his head, and as long as he is doing mostly good, then he thinks he is ok. It takes a humble sinner to see that without Christ, we are not OK.
- **Paul's Radical Reversal**
- When gain becomes loss, it means that God has moved in and shaken us out of our sin-soaked stupor. Verse 7 is the pivot point. Paul says that everything he had thought was in his credit column was actually in his debit column. His high school yearbook was filled with superlatives: most likely to succeed, most likely to study with Gamaliel, most likely to be a Pharisee, most likely to destroy Christianity. Those accomplishments of which he had been the most proud now made him ashamed and disgusted. His checkbook now looked like this: **picture**
- Not only that, but Paul uses a crude expletive to describe all of his past accomplishments. That sparkling resume? He calls it rubbish. Some versions say dung. The word was sometimes used in the Greek to describe the piles of, uh, stuff, you see people scooping off the ground with a plastic grocery bag on their hand and then turning the bag inside out. I saw a lady do that recently while she was walking her dog, and then she put the grocery bag in her purse. Paul would be horrified at that, but here he is horrified at what he had built his life on. When was the blinding flash of

realization for Paul? On the road to Damascus. You can read about it in Acts 9, where Saul the terrorist was on his way to arrest Christians when he was blinded by a bright light from heaven and he fell to the ground. He heard a voice from heaven, Jesus Himself, saying "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" And Saul's response was "Who are you, Lord?" It was at that moment that the grace of the Lord found the Pharisaical terrorist and turned his world upside down. Or really, right-side up. John MacArthur said, "The most legalistic man in the world became the most grace-filled man in the world."

- Verse 8: this is the only time in Paul's letters when He calls God the Father or Christ, "my Lord." He uses this intensely personal address to illustrate that for him, nothing in the loss column matters because of Jesus. He counts everything as loss compared to the "surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." I wrote in yesterday's column about a man who believes this way in Vietnam. This summer he was arrested and beaten after police raided his home looking for Christian materials. A few days before arresting "Mr. Lee", police had arrested other Vietnamese Christians and discovered Christian materials on their digital music players. The Christians stated under duress (read, "torture") that the materials had come from Mr. Lee, a dedicated Christian in northern Vietnam. Police didn't find anything in the raid, but they still detained him for two days, beat him and warned him to stop distributing Christian materials. There's a man who has had a radical reversal in his life, and he is willing to be beaten, or worse, for the surpassing worth of helping others know Christ!
- Verse 9: READ it. This, my friends, is the doctrine of justification. Next week, in the next few verses, we will talk about the doctrine of sanctification. But the Doctrine of Justification was one of the cornerstones of the reformation. We are nearing the 500 year anniversary, October 31, 1517, when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the Wittenburg Door. The foundation of the change in Luther's thinking came when he rediscovered the Doctrine of Justification, that says I cannot stand on my righteousness, and that none of my works will suffice to satisfy the wrath of a holy God. It is only the work of Christ on the cross, and that my salvation comes by grace alone through faith alone. Only righteous people are going to heaven. The problem is, none of us is righteous. No, not one. Therefore, we need to find righteousness in someone else, and that's why the Gospel is such great news. The only good news. Because righteousness is only found in Christ Jesus the Lord. It is imputed righteousness. Paul wrote in 2 Cor. 5:21, "He made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." That is the righteousness, Paul says here in verse 9 that depends on faith. When God gives us faith and we believe in Christ, then God no longer sees our sin; we have become the righteousness of God in Him. How do we know we understand the doctrine of justification? One way is when someone asks us, "Are you going to be in heaven?" we say a resounding YES! Because our hope is in the finished work of Christ. The Pharisee, the good person, the religious person says, when asked if he will be in heaven, "I hope so. But it would be arrogant for me to say I know so." No, the arrogance is trusting in your own righteousness that comes from the law to save you. It is that very thing that will condemn you.
- Justification is a gift from God. It is received by faith. It is secured by the finished work of Christ. It is forever.
- D. A. Carson writes, "...look around for those whose constant confidence is Jesus Christ, whose constant boast is Jesus Christ, whose constant delight is Jesus Christ. Jesus is the center of their worship, the center of their gratitude, the center of their love, the center of their hope...emulate those whose constant confidence and boast is in Christ Jesus and in nothing else."
- Prayer
- Communion